# *Once Upon A Lifetime*

## *in Baker County, Florida*

## The Moonshine Legacy




*By La Viece Moore-Fraser Smallwood*

*Volume 6*

SECOND EDITION 2012



*The second edition of The Moonshine Legacy, sixth in the series of Once Upon a Lifetime in Baker County Florida , is made possible by the financial aid of William W. 'Bill' Gay, founder and chief executive officer of W.W. Gay Mechanical Contractor, Inc. Named one of Jacksonville, Florida's 50 Most Influential People, this self made businessman has assisted many like dreamers to achieve and realize their dreams. Through Bill and his company, he has generously made possible the gift of heart units in the wings of hospitals to sponsorships of Little League Baseball Teams. Named National Entrepreneur of the Year, Bill has generously and compassionately shared his success with others and made possible many achievements such as the second printing of this unique publication representing an almost forgotten period in southern history.*

W.W. GAY
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COVER PHOTOS - Front Cover (l-r from top): Sheriff's Posse 1950s (photo ID on page 285); L.E. Wilkerson; Florida Governor Bryant climbs fence to participate in Florida's largest Moonshine raid; Moonshine Jelly; Edward Clifton "Catfish" Stokes; Marion Ernest "Skeeter" Gainey; An arrest by (front-shirtless) Wade Crawford, on mule Edward Anderson, in cart by Special Agent Bill Eddy and to far right, Baker County Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough; Beverage Director Keating, Governor Farris Bryant, Regional Coordinator Miller and District Supervisor Garrett. Back Cover (l-r from top): Denver Dicks; Boston Dicks, driver and Glen Johnson; Junior Rewis with youngest son Terry, left Karon, Shelia to right, and O.D. Rewis in front; George Washington "Dub" Sands, Jr.; Replica of house where Skeeter Gainey grew up near St. George, Georgia. Sheriff Paul Thrift at Baker County Moonshine still; Jim and Nancy Raulerson Thrift Family (1915); Former FHP Trooper, VInce Smallwood, with Edward "Catfish" Stokes; Car seized at home of L.E. Wilkerson, filled with sugar designated for Moonshine making; Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough inspects whiskey jugs confiscated in Moonshine raid.

SECOND EDITION 2012

# *Once Upon A Lifetime*

## *in Baker County, Florida*

## *— A Moonshine Legacy —*



**Copper still, barrels of Moonshine confiscated at Baker County Moonshine Still**

Volume 6

BY

**La Viece (Moore-Fraser) Smallwood**

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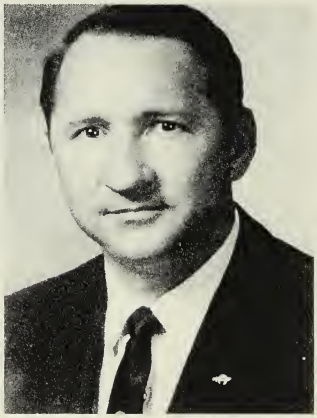
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# FOREWORD



**E. Ed Yarbrough**

The legacy of the moonshine saga in Baker county, Florida would fill many volumes of books were they all put in writing. Since the turn of the century moonshine began to flow from farmers cooking cane skimmings in a five gallon lard can with a cypress knee on top and a straight pipe through a trough of water by a stream to the big time in the late forties and fifties. When still containing forty barrels were heated with butane gas and large condensers that produced a flow of whisky as large as your wrist. The industry became commercialized, organized, greedy and life threatening to some.

Some of the happenings are not told because they involve loss of life, houses burned and prison terms for many of our native sons. Baker county became known as the Shine Capital of the south. The large consumers preferred the local shine because it was made from the many fresh water streams which flow throughout this woodsy county and the taste was better.

What began as a bootlegging saga during prohibition years became a stigma that divided the county with hate and malice toward those who saw what was happening to the young men and wanted it stopped and those who were profiting from this illegal activity. Descendants of pioneer families were at odds and every family was touched in one way or the other.

The chapters in this book are gathered from some that are still living and law abiding and I believe them to be true to the best of their memory because I was there.

The author is a descendant of one of Baker Counties leading pioneer families and was very thorough in researching the facts in this book. You will enjoy reading and remembering a way of life that ended in the early sixties. I am proud that someone took the time and effort to preserve approximately sixty years of Florida history.

E. Ed Yarbrough
Former Sheriff of Baker County (1956-1966)

# INTRODUCTION

In the early years of teaching journalism at the then-new state university -- the University of North Florida -- in Jacksonville, La Viece Smallwood appeared in one of the writing classes. Pleasant and unassuming, she had a sparkle in her eyes and an eagerness that became contagious for the rest of the class. She was already an accomplished columnist for *The Florida Times-Union* so my task was really to help her polish her work.

In the years since, I have followed her columns, maintained her friendship and enjoyed reading her books about Baker County and its residents.

La Viece's Baker County books reveal two striking assets -- she is a lively, intuitive interviewer and a remarkable story-teller.

Interviewing is a formidable word to most writers. It can be difficult, because many people do not want to talk to reporters or writers. "I've never been quoted correctly yet!" was the response I received early in my career as a newspaperman when I went to interview some authority figure.

A good interviewer is one who can get people to feel at ease and to talk candidly about a given subject. As her stories attest, La Viece has that special knack for getting people to relax and have a conversation with her. What singles her out today is that she isn't starting an interview with a preconceived idea of "digging out the dirt." Instead, she is intent on having her interviewees -- such a formal word! -- tell their stories and she faithfully records them.

La Viece is that special person who is a superb storyteller. She doesn't thrust herself into the stories as so many are wont to do; she gets her interviewees to sit back and reminisce, to bring to life olden days so that pictures of bygone lives will live on in memory as well as printed page.

In universities today, this technique has the "high-falutin'" name of "oral history." This is certainly history but it is even more than that -- these are stories of early lives, of a way of life that is passing by. The stories reflect hardship, the ethic of hard work, and days of simpler joys. Each is a story of families building and growing together. Each is a story of faith.

La Viece's stories are warm with human emotion and alive with anecdotes of lives lived in barren as well as fruitful times. There are lessons to be learned if young ones will take the time to read. There is humor here; there are tears, as well.

These are stories best enjoyed sitting on a front-porch rocking chair at sunset, or a living room chair as a fireplace sends out warmth in winter.

William J. Roach
Professor Emeritus of Journalism and Communications
University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida
February 4, 1995

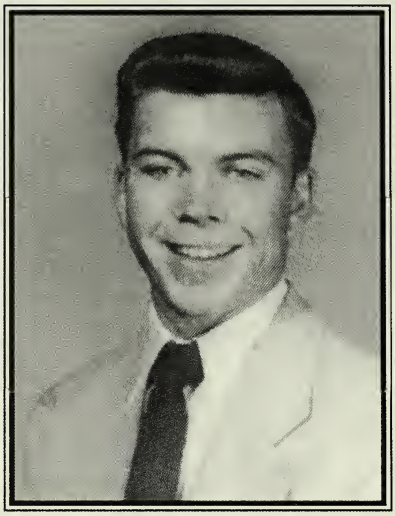
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# DEDICATION

# MARCUS GENE THRIFT

# 1934–1955



Like many a young sparrow,

struggling to fly...

He never made it back home.

But surely,

He would have soared

on the wings of an eagle,

had he lived!

-- *lms '95*

*Not understood! We gather false impressions*
*And hold them closer as the years go by*
*Till virtues often seem to us transgressions:*
*And thus men rise and fall and live and die–*
*NOT UNDERSTOOD.*
*Oh God! That men would see a little clearer,*
*Or judge less harshly when they cannot see!*
*Oh God! That men would draw a little nearer*
*To one another; they'd be nearer Thee–*
*AND UNDERSTOOD.*



Dear Readers,

This volume in the Once Upon a Lifetime in Baker County series is different. It's subject is very sensitive, one that evokes strong emotions. For many, these stories have aroused pain, regret, remorse, and even shame, but still, for most, if they had it all to do over again, they would.

I think perhaps, to understand why this subject spurs such sensitive emotions, you would need to understand the history, the people, the times. This is the logic as to why this book has been written. It is for this reason, unlike other volumes in this series, that anyone using any portion or portions of this book for commercial reasons or for any other purpose, at any time, must have written permission from me, my heirs, or those individual persons who have signed their names to these stories, or their heirs.

I shall forever be grateful to the persons who contributed their stories to this book, for they have done so hoping to leave a glimpse of our history that otherwise would have developed into nothing more than myths, legends and fables.

Perhaps it was fate that I grew up during the '40's and '50's in the moonshine heyday, because it helped me to be sensitive to the interviewees and their situations.

I'm not saying that I advocate breaking the law, then or now, but what I am saying is that in that day and time, moonshine had been an inherited way of life. In the beginning, it was a way for families to survive,

and somewhere along the way, it became a means of pulling oneself up by the bootstrings after a great Depression and two terrible world wars.

Prior to the '50's, you will read stories where men and woman felt fortunate to make 50 cents a day pushing a plow behind a mule from sun-up to sun-down. What illegal whiskey they made at night, down by the creek, still did not provide them with necessities. Some of them were grown before they were able to have their first pair of shoes.

There is an old adage that goes, 'I cannot feel my brother's pain, until I walk a mile in my brother's moccasins.' It is my sincere hope that this will be your analysis should you be tempted to pass any judgment.

It is realized, however, that at the end of the moonshine era, when it was considered more than just a way of sustaining life, the profession became marked by recklessness and turn-coat betrayals; it became a selfish and dangerous business. And I, along with the community, changed views from tolerance to unacceptacle and so an illogical moonshine, bootlegging, and fast-car era -- thankfully -- came to an end.

As you read these stories, I believe you will understand the evolution of the moonshine era, and you will also empathize with a group of men and women, who, despite the stigma, were basically honest, upright, God-fearing people, whose stories will not only warm your heart, but bring a tear to your eye, and sometimes even a chuckle to the soul.

To those whose unique stories and experiences appear within these pages, I would like to say that the expression of gratitude I desire to relate to you goes beyond my ability to describe. The privilege of having many of you gather in my home, on various occasions, seeing some of you meet socially for the first time in your lives, and others of you unite after decades, has been an advantage and remembrance I treasure. To those who were not already my long-time friends, I value your trust and confidence and genuinely appreciate the friendship and goodwill that developed between us.

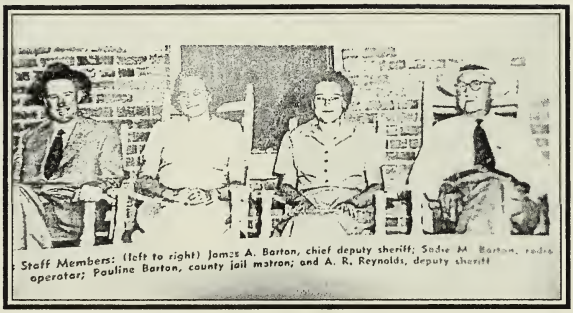
May God's richest blessings be bestowed upon each of you.

Most respectfully,



# Moonshine Legacy

*By La Viece Moore-Fraser Smallwood*




**Sheriff's Staff (l to r): James A. Barton, chief deputy sheriff; Sadie M. Barton, radio operator; Pauline Barton, county jail matron and A.R. Reynolds, jailer.**

No one is certain when illegal whiskey was first made in Baker County, but it was probably long before anyone living today was born. The industry is not just a backwoods affair. It has a history that extends all the way to the White House.

As early as 1794 there was a whiskey rebellion in America brought about by a federal tax imposed in 1791. The rebellion was led by angry farmers who found it more profitable to turn much of their corn and rye crop into whiskey which, they contended, was much easier to ship to markets than bulky grain. After several people were killed, President George Washington sent in troops to stop the rebellious farmers who protested arrests made by federal marshals trying to collect whiskey taxes. The Whiskey Rebellion was an early 'testing ground' on the use of federal power to enforce a federal law within a state.

During the 1870s an association of whiskey manufacturers and high government officials formed a whiskey ring and banded together to cheat the government of taxes imposed on distilled liquors. The Whiskey Ring was one of the great political scandals of the Ulysses S. Grant administration because the chief clerk in the Department of the Treasury and President Grant's personal secretary were among the conspirators. The Treasury Department lost millions of dollars in liquor revenue, but eventually traced and convicted many of the ring leaders.

# BAKER COUNTY MOONSHINE

As settlers ambled into Baker County they hoped to make an honest living sustaining their families by growing crops and raising livestock, but mother nature, the boll–weevil, hookworms, and the Great Depression were among the stumbling blocks the settlers faced. As time advanced, the making of illegal whiskey afforded the farmers food for their tables and clothes for their backs. The people who worked in the art and profession became known as moonshiners. By day most farmers plowed their fields and planted their crops and by the light of the silvery moon, they made moonshine. This is their story.

In the '20s, '30s, and '40s, moonshine was primarily made by hard-working farmers who supplemented their livelihood by crudely brewing homemade whiskey with river water and homemade cane syrup or honey when sugar wasn't available or affordable. It wasn't considered immoral, but was recognized as illegal, and no more so than some folks, by today's standards, who 'fudge' a little on their income tax.

Moonshine was made to drink and to supplement income, in the beginning. It was usually sold around turpentine camps and local bars. The term bootlegger emerged when it was hauled out of the county, first by horse and wagon, river travel, or on horse back. The industry grew and expanded over each decade and with each new generation.

World War II changed the industry. Most farmers quit the business when state and federal lawmen began to invade the area and destroy their primitive stills. However, after the war a new generation found ways to speed the illegal industry and advanced to a more elaborate system of making shine. It was hauled from Baker County in semi trucks and the county's reputation spread across the state and north and south. Things began to get out of control.

By the 1950s, some Baker County citizens banded together to find a way to clean up the county and end the notorious reputation it had acquired as the 'Shine Capitol of the State'.

In a *Florida Times–Union* article on Wednesday, March 24, 1954, headlines that blazed across page 25 screamed to the public,

**'Baker County Sheriff Given 30 Days to Clean Up County'.**

After a five–hour public hearing in Tallahassee, Acting Gov. Charlie Johns, charging neglect of duty, had issued an ultimatum to the county's

sheriff, Asa Coleman. "You have thirty days to clean up the county or be suspended."

Governor Johns told the Baker sheriff, "Sheriff, I've weighed the testimony very carefully. I'm convinced you're honest but you just let law enforcement go in Baker County. As you know, I've tried to see that the people are protected. I want to tell you right now –– I'll give you 30 days to clean up Baker County. If you clean up in 30 days and don't let (blank) and (blank) run the county –– I won't remove you."

The article continued, 'Sheriff Coleman, who was appointed to office by Gov. Spessard Holland in 1942 and since has won four elections, told Johns at the hearing that 'I thought I was doing a good job...I have had no complaints.'

The Governor asked Coleman, 'Don't you think that you can get out and get some of those moonshine still operators?' Coleman answered, "If you give me a chance I'll do my best, but I'll have to put on more men."

Former State Rep. B.R. Burnsed of Macclenny wound up the defense argument by mentioning the maxim, 'The least governed is the best governed' in saying to the Governor, 'I do not think you believe in the overthrow of local self government."

State Rep. John J. Crews, Jr. of Baker County took issue and said, "I resent the fact and intimation that the people of Baker County favor notorious bootlegging and gambling."

Crews, who did not testify, but was asked for remarks, said it was "tragic that a group of notorious bootleggers and bolita peddlers have caused a strong–hearted man to be called before you. I hope the governor instructs the sheriff to take a more active part in law enforcement."

The acting governor said he was in favor of self government, "but when self government breaks down and law enforcement is flaunted in our face, it is time for the governor's office to do something about it."

Frank W. Watt of Jacksonville, a federal beverage agent, testified that Baker County in 1953 accounted for 47 percent of the stills seized in the 15–county Jacksonville district. The figures, he said, were 114 stills in Baker County and 241 in the district.

In four days last January, he said, the federal government destroyed 21 moonshine stills.

Another state witness, Beverage Dept. Agent Phillip Y. Tomberlin, said he swore out a warrant for one law violator and Sheriff Coleman did not arrest the fugitive for almost a year.

Baker County Judge J.C. Lyons testified that the man was in Baker county, that he made a tobacco crop during the time the arrest was pending and even came to the courthouse for purchase of an automobile tag.

The county judge also said the sheriff's office, located down the hall in the courthouse, "is not kept open regularly." In response to a question, Lyons said, "I do not believe it is kept open at all during the week. It's open maybe two or three times a month."

Asked if there had been any gambling arrests in Baker County recently, the county judge said, "About three years ago they arrested a darky and he posted $100 bond and estreated it.'

Charles Ross, a Beverage Dept. investigator, said the sheriff's records showed that his office had made a total of eight arrests for moonshining during 1953. He said he was in Baker County five days and never saw the sheriff.

Other investigators had similar reports.

Asked why they and other Alcohol and Tax Division agents did not include Sheriff Coleman in their raids, investigator Spinks said, "We do not call on the sheriff because we are afraid the information would spread and the violator could not be apprehended."

State Trooper Ralph L. Hays told of the arrest of a Negro, Curtis Bones, in Baker County. In the trunk of Bones' car, he said were six five–gallon jugs. He pulled the stopper on one and determined by smell that it contained moonshine.

He took Bones' car key, jailed the Negro and left the locked car within a fence around the Baker County jail. When he and a beverage agent examined the 'evidence' the following morning, he said all six jugs contained water.

He testified that Bones, when arrested, told him 'to call Mr. Coleman or Mr. Barton (later identified as Deputy Sheriff James A. Barton) and they would say he was all right."

In his own defense, Sheriff Coleman testified that he was from a small county, with 5,300 people and 375,000 acres. His income last year was $5,500 from the sheriff's office, he said.

"My wife keeps my set of books at the Macclenny Cash Store," he said. "I am in and out of the office all week. I have a two-way radio system and can be contacted at all times. I am on call 24 hours of the day."

Coleman said that, "in the last six or eight years no beverage agent has asked for aid. I have no facilities to locate stills, but I am willing to cooperate."

As for the year-long fugitive, he testified that the county judge had informed him the papers were outdated and 'not to bother.'

During the testimony, Gov. Johns asked him, "Why is there so much moonshine in Baker County?"

Coleman replied that the area was "thinly populated and full of swamps and ponds. You can't keep them out."

Witnesses testifying as to the sheriff's character and law enforcement efforts were Deputy Barton, Macclenny Chief of Police I.J. Hudson, Arthur Raulerson of Sanderson, former Macclenny Mayor B.J. Padgett, and Ray Dinkins, Macclenny oil distributor.

In the final arguments, Hodges, one of the sheriff's attorneys, said that "The grand jury is the remedy if law violations are open and notorious. The true remedy is at the polls, not here," he said.

And to the polls it was. The citizens turned out in droves in 1956. The race was on to elect either a political newcomer, Ed Yarbrough, a county native from Taylor, or deputy sheriff James Barton, serving under the present sheriff, Asa Coleman, who did not seek re-election.

Yarbrough took to the backwoods with a fiddle in one hand and a campaign promise in the other, to 'clean up the county of illegal activities.'

During the campaign a circular was distributed to the county citizens days before the election. (See copy at end of this article.

Yarbrough won the election, not by a landslide, but nonetheless, he won. A January 11, 1957 *Florida Times Union* article reported the 30-year-old sheriff's election and goal: 'He hopes to rid Baker county of its reputation as 'the moonshine capital of Florida'.'

The new sheriff announced the appointment of Wilbur Mobley as deputy, James A. Shuler and Lawton Connor as jailers, and Mrs. Margaret Sharman as office secretary.

On January 14th the *Florida Times Union* reported,

'Baker County Sheriff Ed Yarbrough today announced the seizure of three moonshine stills and the arrest of two men during his first week in office.

Yarbrough was assisted by a county native who was now a State Beverage Agent.

In February the *Jacksonville Journal* touted a photograph of the new sheriff and headlined,

NEW SHERIFF USES LIGHT SHOES TO CATCH MOONSHINERS ON THE RUN.

"Don't make me sound like a crusader," said Yarbrough. "Just say that I am a member of a progressive group of citizens who are determined to clean up the reputation of Baker County."

The article reported that Yarbrough felt his major problem was the rehabilitation of the citizens engaged in moonshine operations.

"I sincerely feel that moonshine in Baker County was overestimated in the past. It was going on all–right but not to the extent that Baker County was the operating base and capital of the moonshine industry, as it was called by law officers and newspapers throughout Florida.

"I don't think Baker County is entitled to that reputation when the figures of the State Beverage Department indicate that, in capacity, the Baker moonshine operations were not as large as some other Northeast Florida counties. Even the beverage investigators of Florida and the Internal Revenue Service know for a fact that the situation has been more serious in some sections of South Georgia.

"The good people of Baker county have had more than their share of embarrassment from the reputation given their county."

The *Journal* article reported Yarbrough's chasing a 'fleet–footed moonshiner' dashing for freedom, with Yarbrough in pursuit.

The sheriff had one big advantage over his opponent, reported the article, 'He was wearing his canvass basketball shoes.'

Yarbrough told the Journal reporter, Harry Crown, that on the day of his election, word got around Baker County that he would have to catch the stills within the next week or 10 days or he wouldn't catch them at all.

What the moonshiners meant was, that as soon as the mash now fermenting was ready to run, the liquor would be run off and the stills moved out of Baker County, he said.

Yarbrough said hunters came to his office giving directions to stills, but by the time he reached the locations, the stills had vanished.

He said that most of the operations were being moved across the St. Mary's River in the Big Bend area (that part of Georgia which penetrates into North Florida).

"Traffic in moonshine is avoiding Baker County like the plague." Yarbrough said.

In July of 1957 *The Baker County Press* headlined,

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT BAKER COUNTY.

It was written by a *Journal* correspondent Sam McGarvey. The article reported that the county, long known as the 'moonshine capital of Florida,' shackled with a bad reputation, was now growing and prospering. Moonshine has been virtually wiped out, the school system reorganized, a hospital is nearly completed, FHA insured homes are being built, a recreation program is planned, construction started on a big state hospital--and lots more.

One of the leaders in the reconstruction campaign, former Senator Ed Fraser, sums it up well, the article read.

"Baker County has taken a big step forward. Some things which were only a dream a few years ago are a reality now. And there's more to come."

City Manager W.F. Wells stated that the big change in Baker County just didn't happen. It was planned that way. He said that a few years ago, a group of responsible citizens met to analyze the situation and plan a campaign for community betterment.

"The law abiding citizens were concerned and determined to wipe out the moonshining and make their county a better place," said Wells.

Continuing, the article quoted Baker County Representative John J. Crews as saying,

"One road block to the goal was that bootlegging and moonshining were an accepted part of the county's economy. The county was held down a number of years under a group of law violators, until it was a syndicated moonshine operation and the people accepted it under the false idea that illicit liquor traffic was contributing to the livelihood of many persons. But you cannot build a community without the foundation of decency and strict law enforcement," he said.

In the original meetings held by citizens to 'clean up the county', the article explained that the people and their leaders took a critical look at Baker County and Macclenny.

"They saw that they had other problems, in addition to a lack of law enforcement. We decided to clean house from top to bottom, before trying to interest industry and new residents." said Wells. "We needed better schools, adequate medical facilities, zoning, recreation and FHA financing, or, in short, just what people look for when they inspect a city as a future home," he added. Clean up of the moonshine operations was basic.

The article reported that the election of a new sheriff and the beginning of clean– up operations was a big step. A startling factor of success was the convictions of moonshiners by juries .

In the first trial, States Attorney T.E. Duncan, in summing up to the jury, said quietly: "The question for you to decide today is whether you are going to believe the defendant, or whether you are going to believe the sheriff."

Eight minutes after the jury retired, it returned with a verdict of guilty as charged.

Sheriff Yarbrough, World War II Air Force veteran, married and father of two children, credits state and federal agents with complete co–operation in his drive to wipe out illicit whiskey, the article stated.

He praises the public, too: "The people have supported me morally," he said.

The sheriff also credits the law making possession of over a gallon of moonshine a felony, instead of a misdemeanor, as one of the factors in his successful drive. The bill was sponsored in the '55 Legislature by Sen. Ed Fraser and Rep. John Crews.

(An interview with former sheriffs E. Ed Yarbrough and the late Asa Coleman can be found in **Volume I** of *Once Upon A Lifetime in Baker County Florida.* The two men admitted their past hatred of one another, and recanted how their conversions to the Lord turned that hate eventually to one of love and respect. In 1979, on the shores of the south prong of the little St. Mary's River, the Rev. Asa Coleman baptized his former rival, E. Ed Yarbrough.)

The following interviews are the personal accounts of a few of the men and women who were directly involved in the controversial moonshine industry of Baker County. Permission for the use of most names of individuals mentioned in the accounts have been obtained unless the names appear in a news article that has been previously published.

**"IT HAPPENED THIS A WAY"**

# PAMPHLET THROWN OUT ONTO THE LAWNS OF BAKER COUNTY RESIDENTS THE NIGHT BEFORE THE 1956 ELECTIONS.

## I AM MR. JOHN J. CREWS



You

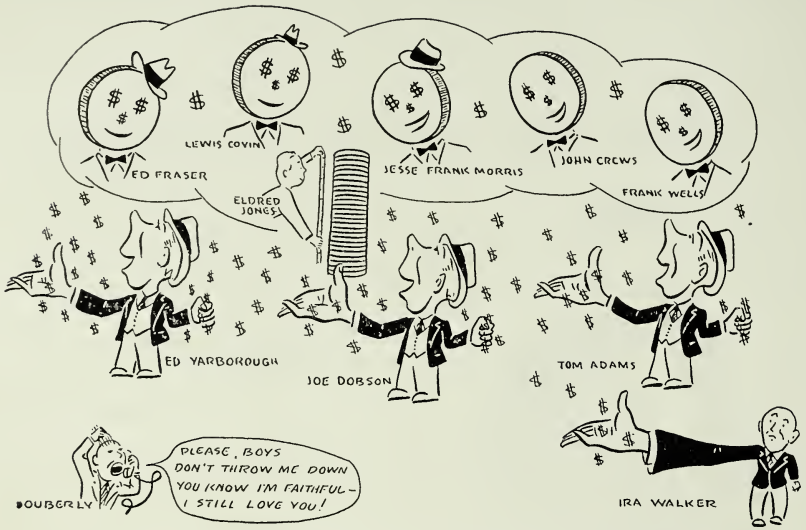
Obnoxious

Illiterate

Hoosiers

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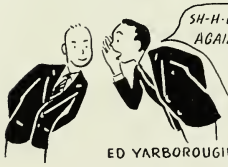



Which brings to mind the question of why Joe Dobson needs anybody's pot — the State audit (a public record in his office) severely criticizes him — in part:

1. Rather than turn surplus fees over to county funds as the law requires — he put his wife on the payroll as part-time help and in two months she drew more salary than you and I draw in twelve months — The commissioners overlooked that — so — the following year — same wife — same deal — same commissioners — so — on and on until **YOU** say stop - - -

2. Bids received for county equipment (trucks, etc.), evidentally were discarded because the highest bid received was accepted — and not the lowest one — the minutes of the meeting didn't give the reason — In fact, the minutes of the commissioner meetings never give any facts — But who cares about the law — or the taxpayers' money — you can always dig a little deeper for more taxes, can't you?

# THE ROOTS OF EVIL




This actually happened at Taylor, Saturday April 14, 1956, immediately after Yarborough made his speech and left the stand. He shook hands heartily and said exactly the words above.

Then, there's his service record of which he boasts very proudly. But he neglects to include all of it — that is the happy ending of his romance with an overseas active duty service man's wife. Oh, well, all's fair in love and war — if you are the winner.



Just remember, when he's pointing a finger at you, the other three are pointing at him — as they should be!

# DID YOU KNOW?

That YOU, the taxpayer, paid expenses for John Crews and his wife, Paula, Ed Fraser and his wife, Jackie, to fly to New York for a week, supposedly to bring industry to Baker County? Where is that industry — or even a report to the people as to contacts made? Who authorized Joe Dobson to pay this money out of our county funds? Their neighbors can give you first hand reports on Broadway hits and night clubs YOUR money sent them to. Sounded like fun!

That YOU, the taxpayer, paid expenses (again by plane) for Crews and Fraser to enjoy a jaunt to Atlanta recently — reason unknown — but they did coyly admit that the clubs in Atlanta are also so very ooh-la-la-la and you know - - -

That YOU, the taxpayer, paid the expenses for John Crews to travel over the greater portion of the state in his master-minded daydreams that you would never know the difference — After all, you didn't finish college, did you? Well, John did. He tells you he financed these trips out of his very own pocket — WE TELL YOU THAT YOU financed them — all of this can be verified by the records in Joe Dobson's office — but then Joe won't appreciate your checking them — it might put him on the spot because the records don't show who authorized the use of county funds for these trips.

That YOU would have been ashamed had you been there — This was in the 1953 session when our representative (John Crews) actually had a fist fight with the State Beverage Director in the lobby of the Cherokee Hotel in Tallahassee over an attempted passage of an anti-moonshine bill. He was on THEIR SIDE then. One admitted bootlegger paid a Macclenny Barroom $150.00 for two cases of "Old Grandad" (bonded) as a gift to John Crews — John Crews went in person to the barroom, accepted, and put the whiskey in his car. HOW CLEAN CAN YOU CLEAN UP? And college forgot to teach John that gentlemen don't engage in fisticuffs!

That John Crews has contacted and asked for great sums of money from the big chain super-markets with the promise of introducing a bill solely for their benefit? Naturally, it would eventually starve you small town merchants out — His request for $5,000 was refused by one of the largest chains because, they told him, they knew him to be a double-crosser from way back. Outsiders know him, DO WE?

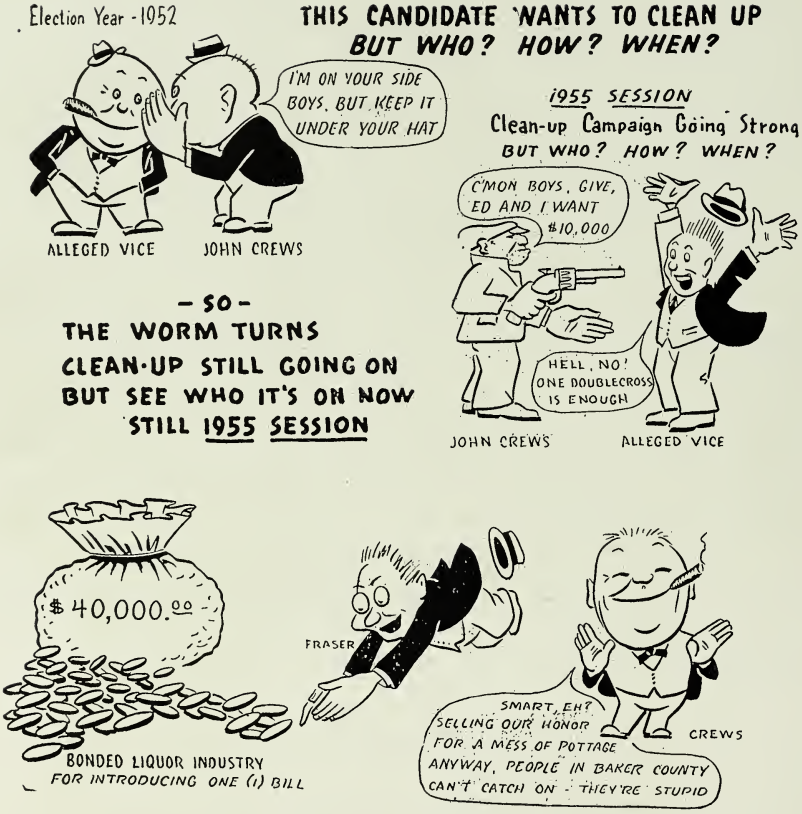
That his political statement in the Baker County Press plainly says that you must agree with him — or you're wrong — Of course, you don't have what it takes to know right from wrong.

That it is true we have two roads of government — but why be tactfully told you aren't intelligent enough to know and too crooked to choose the right one? DICTATORSHIP of this degree belongs in the Kremlin and our sons fought with their blood to keep it out of Baker County. What will you do?

That it is true we have shame — But who brings it about? A man's honor is no better than his word — John Crews admitted he lied to the school teachers — No further facts should need be brought out on this score.

That it is true we have non-development — How can we? That takes cash, and we can't have good roads, high salaried teachers and numerous other improvements without it. Of course, as long as WE sit idly by as WE have been, doing nothing about it, indicates we don't care - - -

**B U T** WE DO, DON'T WE?




The Bureau of Internal Revenue will be interested in this — after all — income is income — no matter the manner — You, the average citizen, pays even if it hurts — that's because you are honest.

# DID YOU KNOW ?

# Marcus Gene Thrift
# 1934–1955

*"I can't help but wonder what kind of person he would be today, and what he would be doing. I think he would have done a lot of good had he lived."*

**–– Ann Piatt Tharpe**

*"His daddy had never seen a football game until he went to see Marcus play."*

**–– Doris Thrift**

*"Losing Marcus was like losing a member of my own family,"*

**–– Mike Gazdick, former teacher and coach.**

*"We dreamed of playing professional baseball."*

**–– Kingsley Tharpe, former team mate.**

*"He was one of the most gifted athletes that ever came out of Baker County."*

**–– Maurice Prevatt, classmate.**

If ever there was an all American boy, it was Marcus Gene Thrift. If ever shock waves traveled throughout Baker County, it was when he was tragically killed while returning home one night from hauling a load of whiskey.

What made this outstanding, intelligent, respected, and popular young man resort to something he really didn't stand for or believe in? We may never know, but this is his story as told by many who knew him best and loved him most. After 40 years, memories of Marcus Gene Thrift continue to live on for many, and it's like one of his classmates said recently, "His memory is so vivid that it is just as if we had been together yesterday."

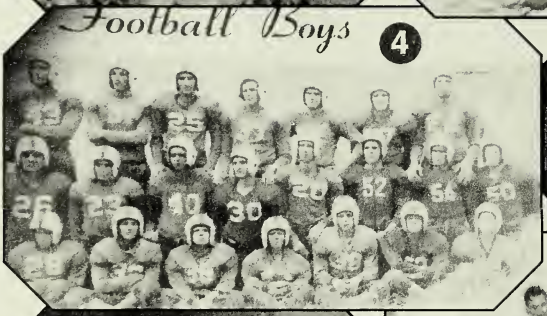
# MEMORIES FROM A SCRAPBOOK





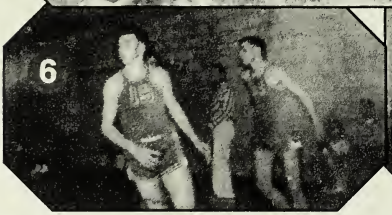




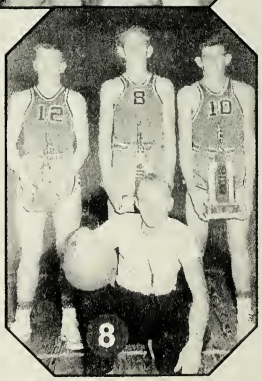













1 Marcus Gene Thrift at football practice before game on first Wildcat football field
2 La Viece Moore (Smallwood) and 1953 senior classmate Marcus Gene Thrift
3 Most Popular 1953 Seniors La Viece Moore and Marcus Gene Thrift
4 Marcus Gene Thrift, third from end on front row, FIRST SEASON in football 1949
5 Marcus Gene Thrift, #15 with ball
6 1952 Marcus Gene Thrift up front, George Windell 'Wink' Reynolds in Crescent City conference game
7 New Year's Eve 1954 gathering of friends. Sitting front row: unkn, Wildon Cook, Albert Byrd; (l to r): Alan Harvey, Gerra Lee Blair, Joy Byrd, Carolyn Jones, Marcus Thrift, Jackie Blair Harvey, Patsy owens, unkn, unkn, Arlene Ruis, Mary Walker, Lamar Knabb. Standing rear: Herbert Overstreet, Eugene "Speck" Walker, La Viece Moore, Myrna Jean Rowe, Violice Raulerson, Bernice Jean Thrift, Glenn Johnson
8 #12 Marcus Gene Thrift; #8 Kingsley Tharpe; #10 Archie Roberson; Coach: Mike Gazdick

Marcus Gene Thrift's watch stopped on April 8, 1955, at 12 o'clock midnight. So did his heart.

As mangled as the car he was driving, so were the hearts in Baker County. The close-knit community had watched the All-Conference Wildcat Quarterback prance out onto the lighted football field for four years amid glaring lights and screaming fans. The team's co-captain was their hero.

As he dribbled the ball for four years up and down the slick, polished floor of the Macclenny-Glen High School gymnasium, every hair on his head was in place, and it stayed that way, as the All-Conference, point guard basketball player thrilled fans with his winning streak.

Just as effectively, he played shortstop on the school's baseball team.

"Marcus Gene was a very special person, well-loved by everyone who knew him," said Ann Piatt Tharpe, a classmate. "He had a great personality, always smiling and fun to be with. I never heard him put anyone down, or knew him to drink alcohol, use tobacco in any form, or use profanity in any way. He was just a good all-round guy who had a lot of friends. I still miss him today, and I never knew of anyone who didn't like him. I couldn't believe it when I heard about it, and even today, it's hard for me to believe it happened.

"And I can't help but wonder," she said, "what kind of person he would be today, and what he would be doing. I think he would have done a lot of good had he lived."

Marcus was born August 9, 1934, to Earl and Doris Combs Thrift who farmed in the Georgia Bend area. For the first two years of Marcus's life, he and his parents lived with his paternal grandparents, Jode and Caroline (Raulerson) Thrift.

By the time he was in the fifth grade, WW II was raging in Europe, and school teachers were scarce in Georgia. His parents, concerned about his education, boarded him in Macclenny with his aunt and uncle, Josie and Daisy Thrift, who sent him to school under the watchful eye of fifth-grade teacher Gladys Crews. Their only child's absence from their home grew too hard to bear, so the couple moved to Macclenny and never returned to Georgia. They eventually built a home on Highway 228 North where Marcus lived the rest of his life.

Earl Thrift was one of 13 children born to Jode and Caroline during a time of mounting poverty that climaxed with The Great Depression era. The family turned to brewing moonshine to help with necessities. Doris's father, Joel Combs, sustained their family of seven children by making moonshine. And Doris remembers those times well.

"The Sheriff used to call and let daddy and all that bunch out there at Taylor know when the revenuers was coming. I was about 11 or 12 years old and since I was the fastest runner in the family, Mama would always say, 'Run, tell your daddy that they're coming.' Then all the men would gather at the Taylor store and be looking for them when they rode by," she said.

"I used to pump water for daddy to keep the coil or something or other cool. Me and my sister-in-law, Daisy, used to go with the buyers in the woods to show them where the shine was hid. They'd load it up and tear out with it. People wasn't scared to make it, back then, and to us it was just an exciting thing to do."

While Marcus was growing up, his father worked at local service stations and occasionally hauled some shine to supplement his income.

By the time Marcus was in the sixth grade, he was showing signs of being industrious. He came home one day and announced to his parents that someone down town had a shoe shine business and they wanted to sell it for $12. His mother remembers the incident well.

"He said, 'I'd like to buy it but I don't have the money,' so Earl's mama called him over to the side and said, 'Come here, son, now don't tell the rest I gave you this,' and she gave Marcus the money. He was adored by his grandparents,." she said.

While 12-year-old Marcus shined shoes in front of Lautice Dugger's Barber Shop on Main Street, he would also sell boiled peanuts to passers-by. When the Greyhound Bus stopped at Power's Sundry, Marcus was standing there to sell bags of peanuts to passengers.

"He did real good and made enough money that he seldom ever asked us for any," said his mother.

As he grew older, he worked afternoons and on weekends at the local pool room owned by Dolice Rhoden.

He excelled in sports, and was a popular player on the Wildcat team.

"His daddy had never seen a football game until he went to see Marcus play," said his mother. "I had seen one once when my daddy moved our family to Jasper and I was a cheerleader. I remember Marcus only weighed 110 pounds and I didn't think they'd put him in the game, but they did. He made a touchdown that very first time, but me and Earl didn't know it. We saw him lying out there on the field and Earl jumped the fence to go to him. I remember Mike Gazdick told Earl, 'He's not hurt, he just got the breath knocked out of him, he'll be alright.' And he was."

In 1950, Doris Thrift gave birth to a baby girl, Vicki. Marcus was proud of his sister.

When he graduated from high school in June of 1953, he was elected 'Most Athletic' and 'Most Popular' by his classmates. His father made a down payment on a new Chevrolet and gave it to his son. Hugh Griffin, owner of the local Chevrolet Dealership, gave Marcus a job, but soon business became slack and Marcus was out of work. Hugh even took him to Jacksonville trying to help him find work, but jobs were scarce, especially for the untrained. For a while he worked in the office for the railroad in Baldwin, but once again when business was slow, he was laid off. He finally found a job in Jacksonville working for an oil company inspecting service stations in need of repairs or painting. But that job was not steady either.

With regular employment a problem, the prospect of making a few extra dollars by hauling an occasional load of moonshine was enticing, explained his mother. After all, his father did it, as did many of his relatives, friends and neighbors. And his car payments had to be made.

In March of 1955, he married his high school sweetheart, a popular senior at Macclenny–Glen High School. Until her graduation in June, and until he could find a steady job, they made their home with his parents. While he was out of work, he hauled a few loads of moonshine for Jule Rhoden. He told his mother he needed the money.

In March of 1955, he and his new bride gave his sister, Vicki, a birthday party to celebrate her fifth birthday. On that occasion, he

presented his sister a little gold chain with a heart. Then he told his mother to take some of his money that she kept for him, and take Vicki to town to buy her an Easter outfit.

'Buy yourself one too, Mama,' he told her.

On the afternoon of April 8, after hauling a load of whiskey for Jule Rhoden, he told his mother that he could make more money hauling whiskey for himself instead of someone else.

I'll be back about 9 p.m., he said. He left while his wife of three weeks was attending classes, and headed up through Georgia.

"It was his first load for himself," said his mother. "I didn't want Marcus to do it, but he said he needed the money."

No one may ever know what really happened, but out there on the dark and nearly deserted stretch of Highway 441, three miles south of Homerville, Marcus Gene Thrift met a semi head–on as it rounded a curve. He died instantly.

"I think Marcus went to sleep," said his mother. "He had on an ID bracelet and maybe that's how they identified him. I really don't know, but the Georgia authorities phoned Sheriff Asa Coleman, and since we didn't have a phone, he phoned our neighbor Wallace Dupree, whose wife Dorothy is kin to me. They got some of our neighbors together and they came over about three o'clock in the morning to tell us.

"I heard them call and went to the door. I heard Dorothy say, 'Open the door, Aunt Doris.'

"When I opened the door and saw them, I said, 'Oh no, don't tell me, Marcus Gene got killed didn't he?' And that's the last I remember."

The days that followed are blurred for Doris and Earl Thrift. They brought their son's body home, where he lay before his funeral service on Easter Day. The First Baptist Church in Macclenny was filled to overflowing and crowds of friends stood outside. The funeral procession to Taylor Cemetery was one of the longest in Baker County's history. Grown men and women mourned, classmates and friends wept openly. Vicki, wearing her new dress from her brother and the cherished little gold necklace, nervously bit the little heart during the funeral service and it left two tiny teeth marks, a reminder 40 years later of her grief.

"Losing Marcus was like losing a member of my own family," said his longtime friend, former teacher and coach, Mike Gazdick. "He played outstanding sports and was the recipient of many awards. He never missed practice and was a role model for all the students. Marcus never used foul language, was an above–average student. He was always willing to assist anyone in need. He was always well dressed and well groomed. He never criticized others, never used alcohol or narcotics. He was aiways considerate of others and had respect for his teachers, coaches and fellow students. I'll always miss Marcus," he said.

Fellow classmate Maurice Prevatt remembers playing sports with Marcus from 1949 until their graduation in 1953. "He was one of the most gifted athletes that ever came out of Baker County," he said. "Not only was he talented on the playing fields, but he was also well–respected by his team–mates and the people in the community. He was a clean–cut guy with a winning personality and always had a smile for everyone," he said.

Marcus's life was cut short at an early age, but his team–mates and class–mates will always remember him and the joy that he brought into everyone's life that he touched, like his team–mate and class–mate, Kingsley Tharpe.

"Marcus was my closest friend. We had no secrets from each other. His death was a very traumatic experience for me and left a big void in my life that I feel even today.

"We played football, baseball and basketball together in high school and dreamed of playing professional baseball. I have so many fond memories of him, playing sports together, going to the movies at the Edray Theater, eating lunch at the Custard Shoppe, dragging U.S. 90 in Mr. Earl's Chevrolet pick–up, double dating –– so many memories."

And for many, Kingsley's closing sentiments are chorused: "I lost my best friend, and the world lost one of its best."
















1 **E.W. "Junior" Crockett - 1938**
2 **Doris Keen Crockett - 1938**
3 **E.W. "Junior" Crockett, wife Doris, with their two sons: to left, David, to their right, Edward Wray Crockett, III - GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY - August 21, 1988**
4 **Crockett Property downtown Macclenny - Sundry Store sold to Paul Rhoden**
5 **Dr. E.W. Crockett, Sr., Baker County Physician - 1930s.**

# E. W. (Junior) Crockett

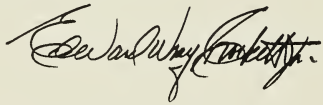
*"Pretty soon the industry grew so big that I had to start looking for people to help me. I had people coming from as far away as Illinois to buy shine. It was like a steam roller, it just kept going and I felt very fortunate when the money started rolling in. I don't feel I was doing anything wrong, or influencing anyone for bad."*

**-- E.W. 'Junior' Crockett**

*"We sold cokes for five cents. People would drive up in their car and toot their car horn and we'd go out to take the order whether it was one person or more. We would attach a little tray to the car window and put their order on it."*

**-- Doris Crockett**

*"I will tell you real quick that the moonshiners I knew were the greatest people I've ever known in my life. I never lost a penny dealing with them. After I moved away and met affluent people who belong to the fancy country clubs, I quickly found that I couldn't say that about them."*



January 29, 1953. Headlines in *The Florida Times–Union* blared, 'SHINE KING SUSPECT NABBED'. U.S. Agents, long on the trail of E.W. 'Junior' Crockett had at last fulfilled their quest and captured their man. They thought that anyway. Like always, the Robin Hood of Baker County got away. And did so legally.

Junior Crockett was never reared in poverty like most of the people in Baker County's rural backwoods, but he had an affinity for those who were. When circumstances beyond his control invaded his life, he used his genius and enterprising qualities to assist the poor and become a Robin hood legend of the people, not only of Baker County, but throughout the south Georgia backlands and other areas where struggling Americans dwelled as well.

When Crockett's father, Dr. E.W. Crockett, Sr., was senselessly murdered by his third wife, Ella Dykes Crockett, Junior Crockett was a 17–year–old–lad from a broken home (See Dr. E.W. Crockett's story in Volume V of *Once Upon A Lifetime*).

Dr. Crockett owned valuable property in downtown Macclenny where he maintained an office and a sundry store. His son worked in the sundry store.

"After daddy's death, I wanted to keep the Sundry Store, and since it had perishables, such as ice cream, fountain drinks, etc, a public auction was quickly held to settle the estate," said Junior. "I remember that several successful businessmen wanted the store and had planned to bid on it, but when they found out I was trying to keep it, only one of them made a bid, and fortunately, I outbid him."

He soon discovered that the local bank had permitted loans to be taken out on his father's property by his estranged wife, Ella, whose name did not even appear on the deed. Young Crockett quickly sought a way to block bank officials who said they would have to foreclose on the buildings.

Dr. E.W. Crockett had developed a friendship with a man from Thomasville, Georgia, who often stopped by the sundry store when in town. Junior told his father's friend about the problem.

"He asked me how much I needed and when I told him, he was more than willing to make me a loan."

To the shock of bank officials, Crockett paid the mortgage off in the nick of time and saved his only inheritance.

That incident set the scene that would change his life forever and launch him in a direction that he had never considered or even thought about.

"The way I got started in the moonshine business was, in a way, a necessity," he said. "I needed to pay back the significant loan to the friend who had helped me salvage what daddy had worked so hard for. Despite what some people thought, I did not inherit any money when my daddy died. Times were hard and commodities were short. People couldn't always pay daddy for his services and he never sent them a bill. He never kept books and never refused to attend a person who owed him for a previous service. That's just the way daddy was," he said.

" The only way some people in the county could put food on their tables and clothes on their backs in those Depression years was from a small income they could earn from making and selling moonshine when they couldn't find work doing something else. One day some of them were in the sundry store talking about how they couldn't get sugar, syrup, etc to make the 'shine, so I told them about the people in Thomasville who had helped me. I knew that was their business, so we drove over there and found out that a lot of the farmers were selling their syrup to the big Roddenberry people for 50 cents a gallon. I saw how poor these people were and I offered to buy their syrup for 65 cents a gallon. The people in Baker County were glad to pay me a dollar, so I made 35 cents off of every gallon I bought and sold. One of the most pleasurable things that can happen to you is when people need you and you are able to help.

"As I became more acquainted with my friend in Thomasville, I saw a chance to make some money for myself to repay the loan and help the people in south Georgia and Baker County as well. Most of the farmers made from 1,000--1,500 gallons of syrup a year. Pretty soon those farmers would not talk to anybody but Crockett. I'd go up there 2–3 o'clock in the morning, load up and go right back for more. Those old people would be up at all hours with long tables set up in their kitchen. While we loaded syrup, they were cooking a meal for us regardless of the hour. I think we started hauling syrup in November and news got around like wildfire: 'Don't sell your syrup to Roddenberry, this man we know down in Florida will come get it and pay you more,' they'd say. I didn't have the money to finance their crop like Roddenberry did some of them, but I told them 'If you got to have your money, tell me and I'll come get the syrup from you instead of making the rounds, so you'll have your money when you need it.' And it didn't take long before they knew I'd do what I told them I'd do. They'd have dinner or breakfast ready for us when we'd get there. I'd go for days on days that I didn't pull my shoes off.

"That brought in good money for me, hauling and selling syrup. Then I found out that the farmers had a hard time selling the whiskey. They'd get caught on the road and lose their haul. Some didn't have transportation to even get out and sell what they'd made. And the rev-

enuers would come along and bust up their expensive stills while they waited for a buyer. So I got the idea, well, if I'm in this part of it, why not help these people sell their whiskey. I found reliable people that would come here and buy the whiskey from the people I had sold the syrup to. Then the people could pay me for the syrup and that happened the same way with sugar. I made connections right there in Jacksonville at Winn Lovett for sugar. They had a big warehouse and I used to buy it and haul it out by the truck load. Most people had to have ration stamps back there during the war, because there was supposed to be a shortage, but I found out there was plenty of sugar, the government was just mishandling it. I went as far as New Orleans to buy sugar and hired people to drive trucks to Florida with it. Their warehouse floors were sagging with it stacked to the ceiling. Just tons of it! There was no sugar shortage. Those people didn't know what to do with it, they had so much of it, so I didn't have any trouble supplying the people with sugar or syrup to make the 'shine.

"In Macclenny, I rented the old Walker warehouse and had it full and stacked to the ceiling on the porch with sugar. When I started helping the people to move their whiskey, I got paid for the supplies and they got to work more. This was good because it was always a matter of time before their stills were raided and the more they could use the stills and make more shine, the more profitable for them. We all worked well together. They sold more whiskey, made more money and no one was trying to take advantage of them. The revenuers didn't know at the time what was going on. I didn't figure what we were doing was immoral, just illegal.

"Later on, as things got bigger and bigger and more people got involved, it got to the point where I had to make more contacts with people all over the country in order for these people to stay in business, so it kind of boomeranged. It really made me feel good to pay those real poor people more money; they didn't have anything and the moonshine industry was helping them have something.

"I'll never forget how happy they were when they'd see me come up there. Whole families would be involved. I especially remember one night when a little boy was helping us load syrup in Jennings. He couldn't have been more than four years old and he was

carrying those heavy gallons to be loaded on the truck. Then someone would take it from him and put it on the truck. Afterwards I gave him a dollar. I said, 'Now remember, this is the first dollar you ever earned.' Years later I met him as a successful lawyer in the Miami area and he showed me that first dollar he earned. He had it framed.

"What ever the moonshiners needed to make whiskey, I got it for 'em. Sugar, syrup, automobiles, etc. I was their supplier. I'd find surplus supplies, get good prices for 'em, and pass it on. We all worked so good together and I can't even remember one case where anyone got tricked by an undercover. There was just a trust during that time with people. That's how it all got started," he said.

"Pretty soon the industry grew so big that I had to start looking for people to help me. I had people coming from as far away as Illinois to buy shine. They made their own shine in the summer time, but in winter, that's when we usually sold so much of it. It was like a steam roller, it just kept going, and I felt very fortunate when the money started rolling in. I don't feel I was doing anything wrong, or influencing anyone for bad.

"During the war when cars were scarce, I found cars and tires for people. I found out where they were and I'd go get 'em and make a profit. If people got sick, or in trouble, and needed money, they'd seek me out for help and I'd try to assist with whatever it was they needed. I liked helping people and they knew it.

Crockett said he had no respect for some of the professional law makers involved because they were fooling the people and were not trustworthy.

"In fact, they used the moonshine industry in order to gain votes when they were corrupt themselves. You lose respect for those kind," he said.

"One state trooper lied and said I shot at him, but later he was fired when it was noticed the window of his car was fired on from inside the vehicle and he was just trying to set me up."

Crockett is talking about Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Hershel Owens, who was stationed in Baldwin at the time. Headlines screamed out from the front page of the *Florida Times Union* on Sunday, November 18, 1954, that the investigation of the

fray was being made by Lt. J.W. Jordan of the FHP. He reported that the driver of the Cadillac, who shot and struck the windshield of Owens' car, was positively identified as Junior Crockett of Macclenny. Owens claimed that he was struck by a piece of flying glass as four bullets hit his windshield and a fifth bullet entered the hood of his FHP car.

The article stated, "Crockett, who is scheduled to appear in Federal court here Nov. 29 for trial on charges of conspiracy to violate internal revenue liquor laws, has been giving troopers and beverage agents trouble for several years.

"One of the wealthiest men in Macclenny, Crockett has long been called by beverage agents a king-pin in North Florida's leading industry, the illicit manufacture of whisky."

The article further stated that the gunfire came from Crockett's car after it crossed into Georgia during the 90-mile-per-hour chase.

The *Lake City Reporter* headlined,

'Murder Attempt Charge Sought in Georgia for Alleged Bootlegger'.

Crockett said that Trooper Hershal Owens was fired from the FHP when it was proven that he made a false report.

"Owens actually shot his own FHP car windshield out which was verified by Columbia County Sheriff Ralph Witt," he said.

At the time, the Crocketts lived comfortably in a modest home on SR 121 in North Macclenny, but one day someone knocked on their door. He said he had come to buy their house.

"My daughter attended a shower here last week, and she liked your house. I want to buy her a house before I return to my home in California and this is the one she wants," he said.

"Well, you must be mistaken," said Doris, "This house is not for sale."

But a good deal was struck and Doris moved out immediately so Paula and John Crews could move in. That's when they built what some citizens called, "the mansion on the hill." It's still known as the Crockett house today and one of the finest in Baker County. It is situated on a hill between Macclenny and Glen and is bordered on the west by the St. Mary's River. Today it is surrounded by a subdivision of houses, instead of the 140 acres of green, rolling pastures and

grazing horses that once cast a picturesque spell. Still, it's aged majesty reflects the affluence the Crocketts attained.

"I didn't just deal in moonshine supplies," said Junior. "I also owned the Dodge/Plymouth Dealership and Doris and I built the EdRay Theatre with Lucy and Ray Dinkins. We ran it until television came in. And we ran the Sundry Store."

During the time the Crocketts owned the sundry store, most of the businesses that served food or drinks offered curb–side service. The Sundry store was no exception.

"We sold cokes for five cents. People would drive up in their car and toot their car horn and we'd go out to take the order, whether it was one person or more. We would attach a little tray to the car window and put their order on it. When they finished, they would toot their car horn again and we would have to go back out and get the dirty glasses. All for a five–cent sale. Can you imagine?" said Doris. "It was really work running back and forth four or five times for just one sale and then having to wait on customers inside, too."

When Doris arrived at the sundry store each morning, she had to sweep and clean up. The ice man brought ice in blocks, which was stored in an ice box. She had to chip pieces of it with an ice pick, then grind it by hand for the soda fountain drinks. In addition, they sold milk shakes, vanilla cokes, lime sours, cherry cokes, root beer floats, etc.

After the war Junior sold the Sundry Store to his friend, Paul Rhoden, who had been hired years before by Dr. E.W. Crockett as the sundry's first soda–jerk. The name was changed to Paul's Rexal Drugs and Paul soon after became the county's first pharmacist (See Paul Rhoden's story in Volume V of *Once Upon A Lifetime*).

Junior Crockett carries fond memories of his Baker County friends, especially those with whom he dealt with in the moonshine industry.

"I will tell you real quick that the moonshiners I knew were the greatest people I've ever known in my life. I never lost a penny dealing with them. After I moved away and met affluent people who belonged to the fancy country clubs, I quickly found that I couldn't say that about them," said Junior.

Crockett eventually moved to Valdosta and successfully went into the coin– operated machine business. He has constructed a luxuri-

ous 105-bed nursing home, owns apartment houses and other real estate.

"I have met people from all over the United States, but I was never obligated to them for anything. We were loyal to one another when we needed help or favors, but we didn't expect anything in return. We just couldn't do enough for one another. We still keep in touch with all those wonderful people who are still good friends," he said.

Although he was characterized by the law as the notorious kingpin moonshiner, Crockett was never convicted in a court of law for breaking liquor laws.

"I never made a drop of moonshine or had a drop made," he said. "I never let anyone work for me that hadn't previously worked in the whiskey business. In other words, I never hired anyone that wasn't already in the business. I never got anyone started in the business or influenced them to come in, in fact I discouraged anyone wanting to come in," he said.

Crockett said his activities in the moonshine enterprise consisted of buying and selling to the moonshiners. He freely admits the action brought him financial gain; however, he wisely invested in other lucrative business ventures as well.

"At one time, we owned a private plane and have taken trips to entertain our friends, as well as professional people like lawyers, judges, politicians, sports figures and business acquaintances. We flew to places like Las Vegas, Mexico, South America, Washington and California. It's been a full life, one that brings back many fond memories," he said.

"I don't know of any enemies I have in Baker County. I feel I have many close friends here and it will always be home to us. We've led a very interesting life, and it has made me feel as though I was on top of the world," he said. "I remember with fondness all of the great people I have known, especially the honest folks that were 100 per cent true and loyal to their word. They are still true friends now, as they were 40 years ago. I feel very fortunate to have been born and raised up among the people in Baker County," he said.

In 1978, the Crocketts purchased the first of many motor homes and have since enjoyed their myriad travelling adventures,

including visiting every one of the United States but Hawaii. They have travelled through the Canadian Provinces, including the Nova Scotia and the Maritimes.

"The most fun was driving Old U.S. 50, called the loneliest road in America by Life Magazine," said Doris. "We've been from the east coast to Carson City, Nevada; old western ghost towns and been on The Oregon Trail from St. Louis, Mo., to Salem, Oregon."

The Crocketts say their love of travelling will keep them on the road in the future. However, they won't go too far, or stay too long, because their greatest interest is still their family. Their son, Edward Wray III, and his wife, Pam, have two children, Crystal and Austin Edward Wray. Edward Wray launched his own very successful coin–operated machine business in Valdosta.

The Crockett's son, David, and his wife, Kay, also live in Valdosta where David is affiliated with the Lincoln–Mercury Dealership.

More than half a century has passed since the tragedy occurred that changed the life of Edward Wray Crockett, Jr. He had planned to be a physician like his dad, but a turn of events, and fate, cast him in another direction. Misfortune? I doubt it. He holds a distinction in Baker County that belongs only to him. Like his legendary father, the immortal sphere of his era of time is cast in history. His quest as a humanitarian was simply woven into the trail of events that occurred in his lifetime and his legacy will be around for as long as there is a Baker County and a history to remember.

NOTE: Read the life of Dr. E.W. Crockett, Sr. in *Once Upon A Life Time*, Volume V.



Jimmy Lyons

# Jimmy Lyons
## Macclenny, Florida

*"I reached a dead end and went straight out through the pines. I was driving a New York Chrysler and I told my cousin I'd just tear it all to pieces before I'd let them have it."*

**Jimmy Lyons**

*"Back then we had them old cars fixed where you could turn out one headlight, or you could turn out both, you could turn out one tail light, or both, and we had one little light that would just shine down on the white center line in the middle of the highway to keep us on the road while they were chasing us."*

**Jimmy Lyons**

Sitting in his office behind his desk at North East Florida State Hospital, Jimmy Lyons feels sheltered and unscathed. He has been there for 34 years working his way up through the ranks from aide to supervisor of the laundry department. Reaching back to an era that is surely a time of reflection for Baker Countians, Jimmy speeds through it almost as fast as he once did on the highways and by-ways of Florida and Georgia. With a memory sharp and keen, he is an endless reservoir of stories reflecting the age of the moonshine days of Baker County.

Born in the neck of the Georgia Bend in 1934, about five miles from Moniac, he was next to the youngest of seven children born to John Westly and Pearlie Thrift Lyons.

The family toiled to make a living on their farm. There were the usual plowing, hoeing, planting, reaping, canning, preserving, hog-killing, beef-butchering days. Down by the branch, the family's crude moonshine still offered a supplemental income to buy shoes, clothes, and some household staples.

"It was just a way of life and I grew up thinking that was what you were supposed to do," he reflected in a recent interview. "We all helped from the time we could. I can still remember being barely big enough to carry a gallon of cane syrup to the still for daddy to make the shine. It was as common to me as hoeing the corn growing in the field," he said.

In time, John Westly Lyons was caught by the revenuers and served time in prison.

"Mama had a nervous breakdown. I went to live with my Aunt Lula Thrift, who was already like a second mama to me, and the other younguns were scattered around somewhere. I think it was too much for mama, with daddy being sent off, and she was left with all of us younguns to take care of. She was in Milledgeville for about two years," he said.

When the family re-united, they moved to Macclenny. John Westly Lyons took a job in Jacksonville and left the farm and moonshine behind.

"But me and my brothers continued working in it," said Jimmy. "That's the only way we knew to get an income. I didn't ever own a still, but I always helped my brothers."

Eventually he quit school. "I got to thinking I knew everything in the world. You know how some young people are, you just can't tell them anything. I was a teen-ager and I wanted me a car. I'd growed up in it, I knowed there was money to be made in it."

When he was 16 years old, a revenuer by the name of Spanks raided a still in Taylor. He was there. He was lucky. He received probation.

"Me and another guy were coming out from the still with a full load of liquor. Them revenuers watched us until we got through and loaded it on an old cut-down Model-A truck. We had started out to the main road and that's when one jumped on the truck on one side and one on the other. The old truck didn't have a top on it. They took us to Jacksonville to jail and we made bond easy.

"I dropped out of school and continued working for my brothers. Then I got to hauling it for them. Eventually, I hauled for Dub Sands and a few more. Dub was an expert mechanic, he could build

them old cars, and make them go so fast they'd out-run anything on the road. I loved it. I spent most of my money going to the races in Daytona when I wasn't hauling. It was during the time when they raced on the beach over there and they'd let us race cars if we wanted to. I was so young and foolish, I don't know how I lived through those days. Sometimes I hauled as many as two loads a night, but always on the average of nine or ten loads a week. I guess if I was going to work in it that much I should have done it for myself instead of working for someone else, but I just never did.

"My brothers had moonshine stills in Baker County as well as places outside the county. One of their stills was on a lake in Winter Haven. We boated our sugar and supplies over to the still and boated the shine back. When it was raided, one of our still workers had to escape by swimming the lake.

"There are just so many experiences that happened during those days. I remember one night me and my first cousin were working at a still up there on the Santa Fe River near Branford. We were always careful when we drove by the state's truck-checking station. We had hauled a load of liquor up to Thomasville this particular time and were bringing back a load of sugar. Sugar had become very scarce and was getting critical because the law had so many people scared to sell it to us.

"We were supposed to store the sugar in an old tobacco barn, so when I passed by that weigh-station that morning, there was a trooper there and he motioned me to stop. Well, I had no intentions of stopping with that load of sugar, so the race was on. It started about 10 a.m. that morning and it had been raining just a little bit, just enough to wet the road. I had outrun him and got away, but I had peeled a tire, so I turned to get off the road because I knowed I was having tire problems. It had rained just enough that he seen where I had turned, so he backs up and comes in there behind me. So we have another race until the tire finally went flat. I reached a dead end and went straight out through the pines. I was driving a New York Chrysler and I told my cousin I'd just tear it all to pieces before I'd let them have it. I knocked down several trees before it stopped. I told my cousin to grab the turpentine in the glove compartment and run. Well,

the state trooper called the sheriff and they put the dogs on us. We could hear them. I knew the Fort White highway was only a couple miles over from us, so I told my cousin that when we got to the highway we needed to quickly stand on the shoulder of the road and douse all of our clothing and shoes with the turpentine, then cross the road to the other side. That way the dogs would be unable to trail us, the turpentine would throw them off. So that's what we did. We crossed the road and hid in the woods. We were looking at 'em when the dogs stopped at the road. We heard one of them say, 'Well, they've been picked up,' so it worked just like I thought it would. In a few minutes we were picked up by my brothers in the car trailing us. They knew something had happened and it didn't take long for them to figure it out.

"During those times we had our own little codes. Wherever we were hiding, we would put a little bush or something heavy enough on the edge of the highway that it wouldn't get blown off and they would just drive until they saw it. It was really a cat–and–mouse game.

"Another time, I was up in Albany, Georgia. Apparently, someone had tipped them off that we'd be coming up there. For some reason that night I felt like taking another road. I had to go over an old one–way wooden bridge. I didn't know it but I had come out on the road in front of where the sheriff was supposed to cut me off. I eased up on the bridge, and there was a deputy who had been stationed on the other side. When he saw me, he headed up on the bridge from the other way. When I saw that, I started backing off, but the deputy's car started bumping me. The Georgia state revenuer who was on the passenger side of the deputy's car jumps out and starts shooting at my front tire on the left–hand side of the car. It bounced off and hit the right rear instead, before I got off the bridge. When I went around him, he was shooting. I had the flat tire or I'd have outrun the bunch of 'em, but after they chased me about 10 miles, I was down to the hub; the rim was gone. I don't know how many times they shot at me, and I never have figured out how they could shoot so many times and never hit another tire. I was scared, anyone in their right mind would have been.

"By this time, they had notified the sheriff and he was trailing me. Flying pieces of metal from my car had beat the grill out of the sheriff's car and metal was flying everywhere. I finally decided to abandon the car and run, so I pulled up by an old fence and by the time I got out of the car, I was over the fence, running. I was young and I knew it would have taken a race-horse to catch me.

"I was out there in the woods all night, not knowing where I was, but finally about 10 o'clock the next morning I came up on a feller's house. I didn't no more than get out of his sight when he'd done called the sheriff, and they jumped the dogs back on me from there. They finally caught me, and the old revenuer from back at the bridge grabbed me and was cussing. He said, 'You old S.O.B., you're the one who tried to run over me.' I told him all I was doing was trying to get away. The sheriff was nice. He asked me if I was hurt. Georgia makes their own law, at least they did back then in some places, and all he was seeing were dollar signs. I knew that's all he wanted was money.

"I asked him if I could make a phone call and he said I could. I told him I needed to know just how much it was going to cost me. He said, 'Well, it will be $1,000,' and if I wanted the car back, it would be another $1,000.

"I only had about 15 jugs of liquor in the car, because I had already delivered some. I asked him if I was going to have to stay in jail, and he said, 'No, you call someone to bring the money and I'll have the judge standing by.' So I did and I never will forget it. The judge had one of these old, long, wheel-barrow mustaches. He was skinny as a bean pole and looked like he was about six foot and a half. He was all drooped over and the old codger said, 'Mr. Lyons, the county has got you charged with possession and transporting of illegal moonshine. How do you plead?' I said, 'I plead guilty, judge,' and he said, 'Well, it's going to be $250 for possession and $250 for transporting.' The sheriff spoke up and said, 'No, No, Judge, you got it all wrong,' and he goes up to talk to the judge and the judge looks at his secretary and said, 'Strike that! It will be $500 for possession and $500 for transporting.' They meant to get $1,000 from me and they did.

"The next time I was caught, me and my brothers were delivering some liquor to an undercover man, but we didn't know it. It was a set up. We had been regularly delivering to a black man by the name of Red. We learned later that he had been caught and told if he'd help them catch us, he wouldn't have to serve time. Actually, they didn't care about me, they wanted the man I was working for.

"Well, they knew we were coming, but they didn't know exactly how. They knew who we were, but they didn't know what we were driving, or what route we were coming. It was up around Pearson, Georgia, where they set up a road-block on the bridge. We never stopped at filling stations on our hauls; we always took along our own gas in cans, so we had stopped on the side of the road to gas up. We had two cars loaded with more than 45 cans of liquor each, a total of 95 gallons. My brother was driving the lookout car ahead of us.

"While we were pouring the gas in the car, a state trooper drove up behind us. We jumped in the cars, throwing the gas cans down. There was a sheriff's car across the bridge and I was running so fast I couldn't stop. I was probably going 120 miles per hour, or more, in one of them cars Dub had built. I just picked the biggest hole I could see and tried to go through. I hit the police car and it went spinning around. My brother was driving the car behind me, and he hits it, too, and goes down an embankment about 20 feet. The impact had knocked the frame out from under my car and it had no control. My first cousin was with me, because earlier that evening I had been visiting my dad in the hospital because he had cancer, and for some reason I had fainted. So my brothers thought I ought to have someone ride with me, just in case, and that's why he was with me. We both jumped out of the car and went running off in the woods together. One of the deputies up on the bridge, who had a sawed off shot gun, was shooting at us.

"Meanwhile, they caught my brother and beat him so bad he had to have several pints of blood and something like 160 stitches in his head. They called in the dogs to put on me and my first cousin. We ran for about an hour and we could hear the dogs coming. We didn't know exactly where we were, but we knew it couldn't be too far from Douglas. Then, it come the darndest flood you have ever seen in

your life and it rained on us all night long. We were just drenched. Can you imagine how miserable we were with no cover, soaked through and it in the winter time? The only good thing was when it stopped, the dogs had not been able to track us because of the rain.

"We finally got over to the road and caught a ride with a farmer into town. I got to a phone and called the Amoco station in Macclenny and a friend answered the phone. I told him I was in Douglas and to get airborne and come get us. He was there an hour and a half later. Even though I got away, they knew who I was. We had lost two loads of liquor and two cars in the skirmish.

"It was a week or so before Wilford was even able to leave the hospital and come home. The law told my other brother that they knew who I was and started trying to negotiate with him. They told him they knew who I was, and if I'd come on up and plead guilty, they would charge me $2,000 and Wilford $2,000 and that would clear it up and I wouldn't have a record or outstanding warrant there.

"When my brother came back and told me, I said, 'No! I ain't going back up there to Pearson where that sheriff is.' So they told my brother to bring the $4,000 and Wilford could plead for me, too. So, when they tried me, they found me guilty. They fined me $2,000 and they ain't never put their hands on me. I never seen any of them. Then the sheriff told my brother he could come back through there with loads for the next three months to make the money back for the lost liquor and cars, but he said that each time we came through we'd have to pay him something. He said that after the three months we would be subject to arrest again. But we didn't go back up that way again because there was just no way to trust the law. Our motto was, 'When you see it, out–run it.'

"One night I had gone out about ten miles in the woods to pick up some liquor to haul. It was a full moon, not a cloud in the sky, so after I loaded up, I said, 'I'm just going to ease out of here with my lights off.' I don't know why I felt that way that night, but I was just riding along there when I saw a light pop on up ahead, like a car light or something. They had backed up there in those woods, waiting on me. I was working for Dub that night and he and his partner had already gone out before me. I guess the law knew just a little more

than I thought they did about us, so when I saw the light, I turned my lights on and popped the fuel to it and started on by them. One of 'em run out there in the road and started shooting. I knew they had hit the car at least twice. I out–ran them and went on up to find Dub and them. We looked the car over and found where one bullet hit. If it hadn't hit where it did and bounced off, I would have been shot right through the back of the head. The next morning Dub looked the car over and the second bullet had gone right up the tail pipe. He must have shot a dozen times and never hit the car as big as it was but twice. I don't know what he thought he was shooting at.

"It wasn't hard for us to get away from them. Our cars just were faster. Back then, we had them old cars fixed where you could turn out one headlight, or you could turn out both headlights; you could turn out one tail light, or both; you could open the door and not turn on the car light. We could just switch 'em all on, or all around or off. We didn't have stop lights. We had one little light that would just shine down on the white center line in the middle of the highway to keep us on the road while they were chasing us. If they were chasing us, they couldn't see it, but we could tell where we were going, and we always 'cased' out the area and knew where the curves in the road were. We got familiar with where we were going most of the time.

"You could tell a loaded moonshine car from anything else. It would roar and biller. I've been through many of them little old towns at night and have to stop at a red light while trying to ease through. You could actually hear them plate glass windows rattle just from setting at a red light and the car idling. Anyone at all who knew about automobiles knew when they saw you what you were doing. We got more attention when we were trying to slip through a town than on the highway running a 100 miles per hour. I learned how to go all the way to Tallahassee on a dirt road, just crossing the highway, never driving on it.

"Dub Sands was the man to be with in this business. He was a genius building the cars we drove. Each morning when I'd come in from taking a load, Dub would want to know if the car was running right or needed any repairs or adjustments and I'd discuss this every morning with him. If it did, he would make them during the day

before I went out again that night. He got to where he liked to go with me in the escort car.

"One such night, he wanted to test this Dodge, so he and his partner got up to 140 miles per hour and Dub wanted me to pass him. I got in all the wind that happens sometime when you get in back of a big truck and it actually blowed the floor boards out of that old Dodge. It had an old wooden floor board. Now Dub was shook up, and it took a lot to get him shook up because he didn't get shook up easy. He said, 'I bet you it won't blow up out of there anymore,' so he went and got some sheet metal and he welded it down, and we never had any more problems. That little Dodge was something.

"I stayed with my brothers sometimes, but mostly I stayed with Mama. I let her drive that Dodge with the Chrysler engine, and you just could see her peeping over the steering wheel. It was my personal car and she loved it, but she'd say, 'Son, that thing's just got too much power. You need to get something done to it,' and I'd tell her, 'Mama, I want all that power, I might need it.' It had two four-barrel carburetors with a Chrysler engine. Mama would squall them tires every time the gears changed.

"She knew I was into shine. She'd say something to me about it all the time. Daddy knowed it, too. They both wanted us out, but they had raised us in it. Daddy never got into hauling it, he just made a little bit, but we just kept right on.

"Right after Ed Yarbrough got to be sheriff, there was a Florida Highway Patrol Trooper named L.B. Boyette that was stationed in Baker County and he loved to run us more than anything. I think he would have taken a load just for the experience, if he could have. He would aggravate us to death; he was never out there on Highway 90, or places for normal traffic. You never caught Boyette anywhere else but up there on the Fargo Road, that's where he stayed, always trying to catch us with a load of shine.

"G.W. Rhoden was Ed's deputy and he talked Ed into buying one of them big Chevrolets with a 454 engine and three two-barrel carburetors. It was supposed to fly. It was a time when everyone was really impressed with big fast cars. I told Dub, after G.W. got this car, that we needed to try him against one of our cars while it was empty

and not wait until it was full with a load. So Dub said maybe we'd run up with him and check him out.

"About a week or so later, no one had tried G.W. with that car. One of our buyers up in Georgia called and said he needed some liquor right then, so Dub said we needed to run the liquor up there. He went up to the Fargo Road to see if the law was on the road. Well, G.W. and L.B. Boyette were up there that night, so Dub said, 'Well, we're just not going to go because we just don't know how good that car of G.W.'s will run; we haven't tried it, so we had better call this off.'

"They went back to check one more time and came back and said, 'They're gone,' I said, 'Well, get out of my way and let me go.' I was sitting there loaded, just across the Georgia line over there by Moniac, so I took off. When I came out and made my turn there was G.W. and the race was on. Boyette was with him. It was a cat–and–mouse game; they were having as much fun with it as we were...it was a man's game, like, who out–smarted the other wins.

"G.W. told me, after the race, that Boyette said, 'We got him now.' Well, that old Chrysler that I was in was slow getting wound up even though I had stomped it to the bottom. Anyway, they whipped right around and were at me for four or five miles. They were not close enough to shoot, but I think they would have if they could have gotten a little closer. Anyhow, I just knew he was going to run up there on me. I never thought that Chrysler would take off and it loaded; in fact I think I had 47 cans of liquor and two cans of gas with me too.

"I crossed the railroad, which is a bad bump running wide open, and the old car kept a–moaning and a–groaning and gettin' it. There came a little rain and I was going so fast the windshield wipers were blowing away from the glass. All I could see at one time was the white line. Pretty soon they started falling back and I could tell their lights were not as close as they had been. Something was wrong with my car, the carburetor had been jerked wide open. I wasn't sure I could make the up–coming curve so I switched the car off to slow down and almost lost control when I got there anyway.

"When I drove into Fargo, I knew I needed to hide until I could get the car fixed, so I drove into the negro quarters and hid behind a

house. I knew Dub would be coming behind me and know where to look. When he got there, he told me that G.W. and Boyette had stopped him, and Boyette had said, 'Well, we thought we had him, but we ain't got nothing to catch that car. Just tell Jimmy we'll buzz him again tomorrow.' And he would, he'd be up there every night.

"Boyette thought he could out–run that old Chrysler I had and one night we had a race on the Taylor Road. We started at the Griffis curve and when we got to Cedar Creek I just eat him up. Next night, he'd be right up there on the Fargo Road to try and catch me again. He'd give the revenuers all the information he could.

"Boyette once took two big army blankets and sewed them together to drape over his car. Then he took a machete, cut down some trees and stood them up in front of the car to camouflage himself. Dub had gone up there to a place Boyette liked to go, called Little and Big Moccasin Swamp, to see if he was backed up there in his car waiting for us. He didn't find him, so when I got there he was waiting for me. When I came by the race was on, but I out–ran him.

"The following night, he was back up there with his car covered up with that blanket and all those trees and Dub made out like he didn't see him. We'd gone back up there and found where he had cut the trees down so we were on to him. Dub came back that night and said, 'Well, he's in the same place, what are you going to do?' I said, 'Well, I'll fix him,' and he said, 'You're not going back up there knowing he's going to come out, are you?' But I told him I'd be all right.

"So I went up to the weight–checking station and when I saw these two big trucks pulling out, I pulled in between them and was going about 50 miles per hour with my lights off. The truckers knew what I was doing, I guess. When I got up there to the curve where I thought Boyette would be, I switched my lights on. I saw Boyette standing up there beside the road listening for the sound of my car. When my lights popped on him, man, he run for his car and he slipped down and I was totally gone when he got up and got to his car. He tried to drive out so fast his car got stuck and later I found out someone had to go up there and get him out. He never did come after me and I wondered what happened until they told me.

"I have out-run Boyette more times than I got fingers and toes. He ran me more times than any man to be the same man," he said, smiling.

"There are so many stories. It was hard work and dangerous. One morning, me and Dub were coming through Fargo just before daylight and a feller pulled right out in front of us. He had a mule in the back of his truck. There wasn't much to Fargo, just a couple of filling stations there. This old feller pulled right out in front of me and I ran into him. The car I was driving ended up 50 yards up the road, turned upside down. We knocked the mule out of the truck, and the old man was injured pretty bad. So was I, but we had seat belts, those regular airplane kind and I'd say they saved us. They carried me to the hospital in Homerville. I had a guard the whole time I was there. If the old feller had died, I probably would be in the penitentiary today.

"Being who we were, we had no insurance on the car and it wasn't in anybody's name. We had to come up with the money to pay the man's hospital bills, and mine. We had to buy the man another truck to replace his. I was driving for Dub and he was responsible, him and his partner, but I think Dub ended up paying most of it. Dub was faithful to do all he could do, he bent over backwards and he would have done what he had to do even if he would have had to sell his home. His partner was a little different. It was always understood that if you were working for someone and something happened, they would be responsible to pay the bills. I think that incident cost about $15,000 and that was a lot of money in those days.

Things finally came to an end for the Lyons' brothers one day up around Adelle, Georgia. "We got a call from this man saying he needed us to haul him a load. We hauled it up to him and he paid us fine, but I felt something was wrong, that he was a crook. But it was one of them times when liquor was moving slow and we were needing to move it, so on the second trip, the law was there with badges. They got me and Wilford at the same time. They tried us by jury in Valdosta. We tried to get off by saying the federal man had tricked us by trying to get us to come up there and party with women and money. We tried to convince them it was entrapment, but they didn't buy it. The old Judge sentenced me and Wilford to 15 months apiece.

He said, 'Son, I'm going to do you a favor,' and he sent me to federal prison in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

"When I got up there, the people said, 'Well, what in the world are you doing up here?' and I said, 'I don't know, the judge said he was going to do me a favor and sent me here.' I tried to transfer to Tallahassee, but I never did get there. I spent a few days in Atlanta. If you ever go to prison in Atlanta, you never get through hearing all the doors close when you're in there. They sent me from Atlanta to Lewisburg on a Greyhound bus with a guard in back and a couple of guards in front. The guards had machine guns in Atlanta. They had me handcuffed and shackled and that's the way I rode the bus. I was about 25 years old at the time. They kept me in minimum custody on a farm. When they discharged me, they wouldn't do it before midnight, but my family was there waiting for me. That was the last of my moonshine career. I had to report to a parole officer in Jacksonville after prison. I got a job in Jacksonville with a water company. I didn't care about that, so I put in an application with NEFSH and went to work for them."

Jimmy married Lois Smith of Taylor. They have two lovely daughters.

"If I had to go back and live the life over I wouldn't do that. I think I'd rather be racing on a race track. I did it because I love to drive the fast cars. I blew the money partying.

"There is one thing for sure in my life I'd do differently, if I had it to go over. I'd have me an education. If I'd had an education, I could have been no telling what out here at NEFSH. As it was, I started out in 1961 as an aide for $185 a month and I've worked up to department head in the laundry, but that was having friends help me up the way. Many opportunities had to be passed up because of the lack of an education.

"I remember once my daddy said to me, 'Son, you're making a little money, why don't you invest it.' And I said, 'Invest in what?', and he said, 'Son, I'm going to tell you, bootlegging ain't going to be here forever.' And I said, 'Daddy, there will be bootlegging here as long as the world's here. It's been here all your life,' and he said, 'Yes, but everything changes.' And I said, 'Well, this ain't going to change, there

will be bootlegging from now on.' And he said, 'Son, see that big oak tree out there?' and I said, 'Yes,' and he said, 'Does it stay the same all the time?' I said, 'No, it grows, sheds it leaves and puts more on,' and he said, 'It changes,' and I said, 'Well, you talk about investment, what am I going to invest in?' He said, 'Buy land up there in the woods,' and I said, 'Daddy, ain't nobody ever going to want that old land up there in them woods.' And I didn't think they ever would.

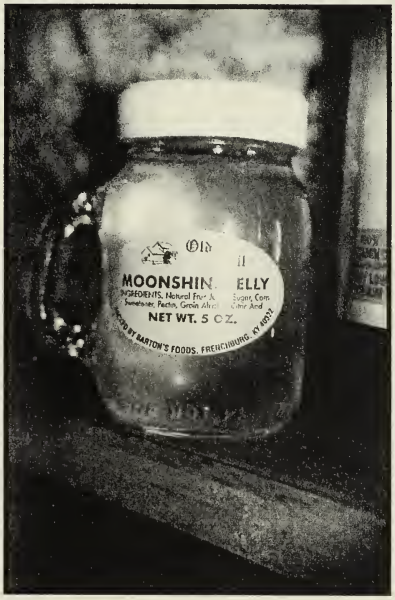
"That was back in them days when lots of that old land up there around Taylor didn't even belong to anyone; I think you could homestead it. I thought it would always be worthless. I could have bought land right here in Macclenny for two to three hundred dollars a lot and almost all of 221 for nothing. But who had the insight for that?

"My money was usually always on me, or stashed away somewhere. I didn't use no bank, I mostly kept it on me or in the car. I really never had more than eight or ten thousand dollars at one time. I partied a lot, and I gave Mama some, whatever she wanted. As I said, I was young and foolish. I was hauling shine every night all up in Georgia or down in south Florida, east and west, north and south.

"The law wasn't always honest, either –– especially those in Georgia. One night, the law raided one of our stills up there in Stattenville, Georgia, and run the boys off working it. They hauled the liquor and condenser, water pump and an old jeep off and locked it up in the jail yard. That night, Dub's partner went to see the sheriff up there and he gave him the key to the jail and we went over there and hauled all that off from the jail yard. It was in the papers that they had raided the still and the bootleggers had stolen it back from the sheriff. But it was a payoff. So many of them were interested in was what they could get out of it and not so much sending you off for doing it. All they could see was dollar signs.

"I would never get involved in this dope and stuff that ruins people's lives. Anyone that wants to can go right down to the corner and buy a bottle of liquor. All I was doing was giving them a cheaper drink and it was just as good a liquor, maybe better. In other words, if I was the only one producing liquor, it would be different, but the government is in the business, the state is in the business, and all I did was cheat the government out of taxes, no more than when some

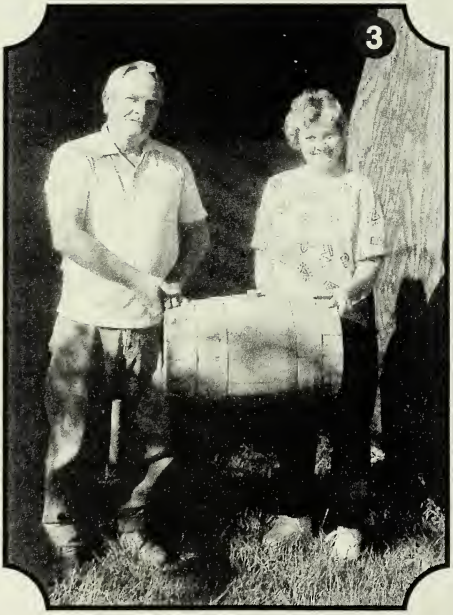
people today cheat the government out of taxes. I was raised up thinking there wasn't anything wrong with it. Either you did it or you starved to death. Jobs were not available and when they were, you didn't get paid enough to live on. Things changed when the times changed, but I don't regret it at all. If it came back down to those choices and I had no other way to make a living, I'd do it again."


















1 Londa Thrift ca 1950s
2 The Jim and Nancy Raulerson Thrift Family ca 1915. Back row: Serena Thrift (Sigers), Rosie Thrift (Howard), Allie Thrift (Norton) and Nancy Raulerson Thrift. Front row: Londa Thrift, Harley Thrift and James Thrift
3 Moonshine jug found in attic after the death of Londa Thrift. Son Willard Thrift and daughter Kaye Warner
4 Lilie Pierce Thrift, wife of Londa with her brother C.L. Pierce of Glen St. Mary - 1994

# The Londa Thrift Family

**of North Macclenny**
**With Lillie Thrift, Willard Thrift**
**and Kaye Thrift Warner**

*"Daddy gave us a good life. We never thought anything about the moonshine then and we don't today. The things I remember about my daddy are priceless. I never heard him say a harm's word about anyone, and I never knew him to drink and I never heard him and mama argue or have a cross word between them. "*

Kaye Warner

*"I can remember the stress of going with a loaded car or truck, and after delivery the exhilaration returning home. I felt like the wheels of the car were off the ground and I was driving along on air."*

*"We didn't keep our money in the bank. We hid it, sometimes in the freezer and sometimes we'd bury it. Daddy buried some of his and we could never find it."*

*"I remember telling someone once I was making more money than I could ever spend."*

Willard Thrift

*"I've shot that gun three times many a time,"*
**Lillie Thrift**

The Londa Thrift family lived on land that was once occupied by their forefathers on Rt. 1 in north rural Baker County, five miles from Macclenny. The family is not sure just when Londa began making moonshine or manufacturing moonshine stills for boot– leggers, a term meant to evade legal prohibition to avoid payment of taxes. They aren't sure if their grandfather Jim Thrift made 'shine', but they

remember that he regularly carried a long barrel pistol that was consistently visible hanging from his back pocket.

During the Depression, Londa worked for the WPA (Works Progress Administration) for three dollars a week and watched his children go to school dressed poorly while he grubbed a scant existence from farming in any spare hours of the day and night. At some time, Londa and his wife Lillie (Pierce) grabbed an opportunity to have a better life by making a little moonshine to supplement their meager income. They joined a legion of Baker Countians who did the same thing. Making moonshine from necessity, to survive those lean years, touched almost every family in the county in some way.

"I remember I was in the Seventh grade when I first became aware of the way I dressed," said the couple's son, Willard. "It seemed like all the other boys had jeans to wear, and I can remember I only had two pairs of old overalls to my name. I would wear my shirt on the outside to cover my overalls hoping they would think I had on jeans," he said. "We were real poor and things were real bad back there when I was born in 1933."

Londa passed away in 1992 and left his family heart–broken. The man who built and supplied moonshine stills of every size and make to Baker County bootleggers was their idol. Making moonshine in the creek back of their house was a way of life they now see as a legacy and they recall with pride how they once banded together to protect their enterprise.

"We knew to shoot the gun three times, or blow the car horn, if strangers came around," said Willard. "If anyone in the area was working at their still they would scatter until the danger of being raided was over," he said.

"I've shot that gun three times many a time," said Lillie, smiling smugly.

"Daddy gave us a good life," said his doting daughter, Kay. "We never thought anything about the moonshine then and we don't today. The things I remember about my daddy are priceless. I never heard him say a harm's word about anyone, I never knew him to drink and I never heard him and mama argue or have a cross word between them. Daddy never said bad words; oh, he might grumble if someone got his fishing

place, but nothing bad. He never gossiped and his word was his bond. If he told you he'd do something he would stick by his word. And anyone could count on daddy to help them if they needed it," she said.

During the war, Londa went to work for the Jacksonville Shipyards. That's where he learned to weld, said his family. The trade gave him the skill and experience he would need to manufacture the moonshine stills to be used by bootleggers in his shed at home.

"I started working in the moonshine business my senior year of high school," said Willard. "I drove the shine car. I enjoyed that part of it. I can remember the stress of going with a loaded car or truck, and after delivery the exhilaration returning home. I felt like the wheels of the car were off the ground and I was driving along on air," he said.

"I knew all the back roads and could drive all the way to Macon, Georgia, without going through one red light. We'd take cans of gas with us so we wouldn't need to stop for gas while our car was loaded with 'shine'. Sometimes a follow-up car would come behind me. We had a signal between us that at certain check points I'd leave a pile of gallberry sticks and if something happened they'd know how far I'd gotten and they would be able to back track and see what happened. I usually hauled 'shine' several times a week and received about $50 a load, depending on the size. Sometimes it was more. I remember telling someone once that I was making more money than I could ever spend.

"We didn't keep our money in the bank. We hid it, sometimes in the freezer and sometimes we'd bury it. Daddy buried some of his and we could never find it," he said. "Silver dollars were plentiful back then and someone paid me with a big bag of them once, so I drove up to a bank window in Jacksonville to cash them in. The cashier left and went to the back of the bank and when she returned she said for me to drive around and come inside. I got scared and left," he said.

The family remembers an occasion when one Friday afternoon in 1953 the revenuers came calling.

"I was in the house watching Howdy-Doody on TV," said Kay. "I was about five years old and Willard came running in the house for the shotgun and told me to stay in and not come out," she said.

"The two revenuers didn't have proper warrants to come on the property," said Willard. "Daddy wasn't home and I wouldn't let them

come past the gate to search so they looked over at my sister and said something about taking her with them. That's when I went in to get the gun. They left right after that," he said.

An account in the Florida Times Union concerning the incident that happened in 1953 reported that warrants were issued on Monday charging Londa with possession and failing to register a distillery. Five other persons, charged with 'resisting, opposing, impeding, intimidating and interfering with' the agents, 'by force of arms, to–wit, with a shotgun and hammer did oppose, impede, interfere and intimidate,' the officers in the execution of their official duties.

The article stated that the agents had parked their car on a paved road and carried dynamite to a still they found behind the Thrift's farm on Friday. After using up all explosives carried to the still, the agents went for more to finish the job. They found a road leading out of the still area to a gate near the Thrift's house. When the agents returned to the gate in their car with intentions to return to the still, they were met by the Thrift's and two of their cousins. The agents reported they were told they would be killed if they entered the gate.

The Thrifts were taken into custody without a show of resistance, and later released that day. Nothing ever evolved concerning the incident. The news clipping failed to mention that the agents had threatened to take one of the Thrift children with them, which had started the whole fray.

Londa Thrift was from a family of seven children born to Jim and Nancy Thrift. He never had an opportunity to attend school and learn to read and write.

"He could write his name, though," said Kay, proudly. "I used to take him to the doctor and I'd always fill out the necessary papers and he'd sign," she said.

In 1964 Londa made a still for someone introduced to him by a friend. That night he told his wife and son, 'I believe I made a mistake today.' He was right. The following day, he was arrested by federal agents who had photographed the whole deal from a cornfield across the road from the Thrift's farm. He was sentenced to prison.

"Daddy sold some of his land to provide money for us while he was gone," said Kay. "Mama got a job at North East Florida State Hospital. What money he had saved went for lawyer and legal fees.

"I drove him into Jacksonville to the courthouse and let him out the day he was to begin serving his time," said Willard. "We didn't say a word as we drove in and when he got out of the car I watched him walk across the street and disappear from my sight. It was a pretty sad time. A few days before, me and him went out in the back yard and set out a few orange trees. That was our way of saying good–bye. Over the years, we had travelled many miles together in silence. Daddy wasn't a man that liked to talk and I didn't talk much either. We'd drive all the way to places like Macon and neither one of us would say a word to each other, but we knew when it was time to stop and get a drink, but we'd never say a word. We didn't even play the radio.

"When daddy worked in the fields with us, he didn't talk to us except to tell us just what he wanted done. It was just his way and we never thought anything about it. He just liked everything quiet and peaceful," said his son.

In March, 1964, registered under the number 21860–TF, Londa began serving a year and a day in the Federal Correctional Institution in Tallahassee in the shadow of a huge moonshine operation he helped to set up on a large farm in sight of the area. Later, he was transferred to the Federal Prison Camp at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, under number 558–EF.

"Daddy learned to read and write in prison and I got my first letter from him while he was there," beamed his youngest daughter. "He may not have spelled all the words right but I cherish that letter," she said. "The only time I ever remember him going to church was when we'd go over there and go to church with him."

Londa was paroled on September 22 of the same year after serving only six months.

"My brother Jimmy, Mama, and I went to pick daddy up in Pensacola," said Kay. "I remember they gave him some clothes and a $20 bill. I never felt embarrassed over that incident, ever. In fact, the same day my daddy left to serve his time, my best friend's daddy was sentenced to prison, too.

Londa never dealt in the moonshine industry again, said Kay. Instead he plowed the land of his heritage and began a chicken farm. He found quiet time to walk in the woods behind his home and fish

with his son-in-law, Marvin, in the near-by river. He spent quality time with his family while he nursed an ailing heart.

When he died April 9, 1992, his family was devastated.

"He had been plowing corn all day," said Kay.

Today, the same house where Londa and Lillie reared their family still stands, but it has been moved to the back of the field down a peaceful country lane and renovated by Kaye and her husband, Marvin Warner. And when an empty five gallon wooden barrel with a faint trace and aroma of aging moonshine chips was found in the attic after Londa's death, a flood of memories befell the family. Undaunted in their convictions, the barrel reflected the life and times they lived in the specter of the moonshine era and surfaced as an historical monument.

Today, Willard lives close by with his wife, Mary Sue (Crawford), and tends the long string of gleaming white chicken houses where his daddy once quietly labored with him. Kay has honored her father's wishes never to let the land stand idle. She and her husband and 15-year-old daughter, Loni, named for her grandfather, have planted 91 peach trees.

"I just couldn't stand to see the land barren and idle because daddy always had something growing," she said.

Stashed away in a decorative trunk in the bedroom of her home where she grew up is a small revered box. Inside, tied with a thin red ribbon is a nostalgic stack of cherished letters that her father wrote her from prison, the sprawled handwriting a constant reminder to her of what life is really all about. It's respect for the memories and a legacy that will not come their way again.

**LETTER FROM LONDA THRIFT TO HIS DAUGHTER KAY**
**June 14, 1964**
**Macclenny, Florida**

Dear Kay

I am fine and hope you ar too. Kay I wont you to plosh my black shews for me and i will think you and help bess with the hose work. Well the sun is going don and it look prety . Maby befour long I will be home. I think we all will have a good time. I try to rit more next time.

Londa

# Karon Rewis Marsh

## TAYLOR AND MACCLENNY FLORIDA 1994
## A FAMILY'S LEGACY

*"We learned to hate the lawmen, or think we did anyway, because they were taking food from our table."*

*"Daddy knew all kinds of ways to fool them. He'd put a still right by a hog pen because the lawmen knew hogs were bad to get in a still and they would never think daddy would put one there. He loved to out smart them."*

*"Daddy had a spiritual side. Once in a while he'd get us up and say, 'Ya'll get up. We're going to church,' and we'd take off and go to D.L. Griffis's church. He 'd set me on his knee and sing Amazing Grace, what few lines he knowed. You could feel that spiritual side."*

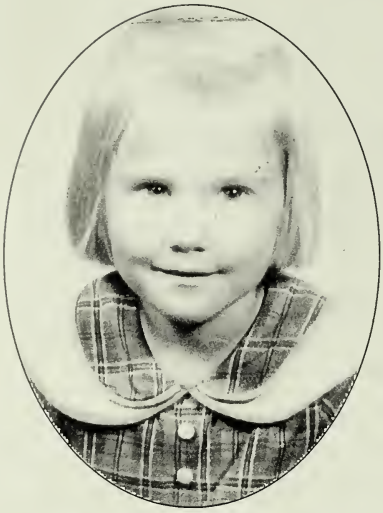
*"I jumped from my seat and stumbled to the Judge's bench. I fell on my knees and screamed, 'Please don't take daddy away, oh no, oh no,' I yelled."*

Karon P Marsh



**Lonnie Rewis, Junior called Junior Rewis**

It was early in the morning and Lonnie Rewis, Jr., stood on his front porch in Taylor, Florida, pumping some cool well water from his "pitcher" pump. As usual, he dabbled his shaving brush into some creamy white lather sitting on the water shelf. Hanging from a nail on a 2x4 rough lumber slat was his "looking glass" where he combed his straight brown hair into a little swirl -- that is, before he got a crew-cut. He was on his way to work -- moonshining!



**Karon Rewis First Grade**
**Taylor Elementary School**
**Taylor, Florida**

That's how his oldest daughter, Karon Rewis Marsh, remembers it. Her daddy, she said, was, and still is, her idol, her mentor, her inspiration. She says she's proud to be a moonshiner's daughter.

" He was everything to me," said his pretty 45–year–old daughter. "He was a mama and a daddy. He loved his home and family, he tended to his business and didn't plunder in yours, and even though I used to think I hated my life, I know today that because of who I was, and who daddy was, I had the best of everything."

Thus begins a story about a man some called notorious, some called a friend, and everyone but his family called Junior Rewis. They called him "Junney."

"I can't remember when moonshine didn't go on at my house, because as long as I can remember my daddy made whiskey," she said. "The earliest I can remember is when I was five or six years old with a lot of responsibility. Even though he placed it on us, I don't think he tried to do that to punish us, but we needed to know that kind of thing. He was a real early riser, and when he called us he didn't call twice."

Karon said from the time she could climb up on a chair she was cooking and washing dishes.

"I can't remember when I couldn't cook something, even if it was just boiling an egg. The house we lived in had a fireplace, but it was a cold house, no heat other than the fireplace, and when we got up we got the splinters and started a fire and tried to get the whole house warmed, but it was still cold. Then we'd go to the hand pump and pump some water and put it on the stove to get it hot to wash dishes. We had a two burner kerosene stove. We used a dish pan, because we didn't have a sink when I was little. We had electricity, but we had an outdoor toilet and took baths in tin tubs in our hall."

Karon was born in 1949 at the home of her maternal grandparents, Baker County pioneers Mitchell and Mae Rhoden.



**Lonnie Rewis, Sr. and his wife Bessie Benton Rewis**

"I spent a lot of time at my Grandpa and Grandma Rhoden's house because they lived down the road. My daddy's parents were Lonnie and Bessie Rewis, Sr., and they lived just across the branch from us. We all had old, fat–lightered houses with front porches and old pitch–tin roofs.

"As I grew up, daddy didn't hide the fact he made whiskey, and I always knew what was going on and I was always worried, even in school, I was always worried he was going to get arrested. I can't remember when I wasn't worried and sometimes I'd know if the revenuers was around because we'd be outside playing at school and if I saw a green jeep, I knowed they were around. It didn't take me long to know who Mr. Spanks was and this one and that one, and if I saw them pass by Taylor school, I'd make like I was sick and I'd go home and tell daddy. I'd say, 'Daddy them revenuers is out' and he'd want to know when and where I'd seen them, and I'd say, 'Yes sir, it looked like Mr. Spanks,' and that's another thing about my daddy, we always had to say 'Yes sir,' and 'No sir' and 'Thank you' and 'Please.'



**O.D., Karon and Shelia at Grandma Rewis's home**

"In school, they'd ask the students what our daddy did for a living and I'd always say, 'My daddy's a farmer' which he was. We lived on 50 acres and he had hogs and cows and all of that. He'd butcher his hogs and when we had visitors, daddy always made sure they had something in their hands to take home with them. He liked to give people things.

"He liked a nice yard and when I say a nice yard it might be different than what you'd consider nice today. He would go out in the



**Junior Rewis with youngest son Terry, left Karon, Shelia to right, and O.D. Rewis in front at home in Taylor - Jan. 1960**

woods and dig up trees. He'd set 'em out in the yard and regardless of what time of year it was, or how big, they'd live. He just had that special touch, and even though the house we lived in was old, he kept the yards immaculate. We had an old split rail fence with running roses, and he made us keep the yard clean. He couldn't stand a piece of any kind of paper laying around. He didn't care if we lived in a lean–to as long as it looked presentable and clean.

"And about our couch –– he called it a 'settee' –– he'd say, 'It don't matter if the old settee is old, worn–out, you can put a clean sheet on it and it'll look fine,' and he'd always tell us, 'There's more than one way to skin a cat.'

"If you drove up to our house, you would know right away the person who lived there was an artistic person, and I know my daddy was artistic. He didn't have an opportunity to cultivate it. I can't explain it, it wasn't an uncomfortable immaculateness, but a homey and comfortable look.

"Everyday when we'd get in from school, if there was dishes to wash, we did it, and if it was winter we'd go out and gather wood, and if he had cane growing, you'd be out hoeing it, or what ever was going on, you'd be a part of it.

"As far as the whiskey making, if someone came up to our house –– and many did because he always had a whiskey still going except when one got chopped up and he, or someone else could solder it back together again –– well, daddy would say, 'Did you offer to fix him a drink, or cook something for 'em?' And even if there was nothing in the house but eggs to scramble, I'd have to cook.

"I always knew where daddy's stills were. He was real smart and usually they were right under the law's nose, just where they wouldn't think he'd have one. Daddy would say that was the safe

place. He loved playing cat and mouse with him. Actually the Feds liked my daddy and were very respectful to him.

"One of the state beverage agents, who was a local native, lived on one side of the river and we lived on the other. Well, he'd come over on our side of the river searching for daddy's still, and daddy would sometimes have one over on his side at the river going full time just to throw him off.

"One time daddy put a still way behind Taylor school house, and I'll never forget it because I can see it now. I must have been about in the 6th grade and the caretaker, Mr. Crawford, had a son, Dwayne, who was always plundering in the woods. Daddy's copper still was down there ready to run, and we were depending on that money, so Dwayne found it and he came right back to school and drew a picture of it on the blackboard. He said, 'And I know who it belongs to.' And everyone said, 'Who?' and Dwayne said, 'Junior Rewis.' I left school and went home to tell daddy. I said, 'Daddy, they found it, they know it's there.' The beverage agent's daughter and Sheriff Ed Yarbrough's niece were in my class. I knew they were going to go home and tell their daddy, so I went home and told my daddy. Daddy didn't go back to the still and the best I remember they blew that one up.



**Groundhog Still**
**Property of Karon Marsh**

"It's kind of like when that happens it takes a long time to recover from it because you'd have to save up some money and rebuild a still and go through the whole nine yards again. Most of the time they confiscated your water pump and everything it took to make the whiskey. If they'd just chop a hole in it you could repair it. It makes you wonder why they didn't blow 'em all up, but anyway we'd have to start over again.

"My daddy was smart because a lot of times he'd know when they were watching his still, 'cause he'd be watching them. He'd do

little things like take a little tiny stick and put it between the rim and the pot lid and if he came back and the stick was gone he'd know someone had been there because that little piece of wood was gone. Then he wouldn't go back to it. He'd either wait it out until they chopped it up or blowed it up.

"We learned to hate the lawmen, or think we did anyway, because they were taking food from our table. Ed Yarbrough was sheriff and the Yarbroughs and Rewis's had a sorta' Hatfield–and–McCoy reputation. They'd had fights and bad relationships. The sheriff was always after my daddy and who ever my daddy was messing with as far as whiskey was concerned. He was always riding shotgun on them and it was sorta like, 'I'm going to get Junior Rewis if I don't get anybody else,' and the beverage agent was just about as bad.

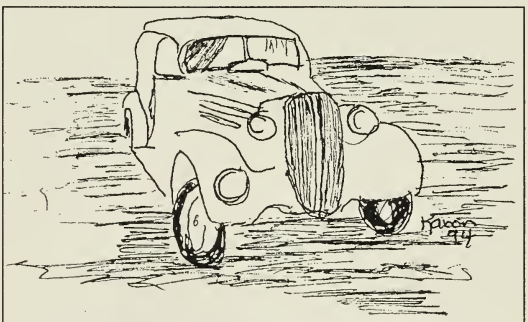
"Well, this on–going feud spilled over into my childhood because I hated 'em when I was a youngun' or thought I hated them. I think it was because just about the time it seemed like we were going to have some money they'd destroy our still and I hated them for that. And I'd sit and listen to 'em talk about how you couldn't underestimate the beverage agents or Ed Yarbrough, and what all they'd like to do to 'em if they could get 'em. You know, I thought I hated them, because they were the enemy to my family, trying to keep us from making money we needed for our family, and for knowing they'd send my daddy off to jail, but now I understand they were only doing their job. I can remember that my sister and I used to pile big mounds of sand in the road trying to make them get stuck because they would be riding around looking for our daddy's stills.



**Mae Rhoden, wife of Mitchel**

"I spent a lot more time with my Grandma Rhoden than I did with Grandma Rewis. Grandpa Rewis, who was blind in later life, stayed in prison more than he stayed out, for moonshining, and Grandma always had a bunch of children to raise. They had lived in

West Palm Beach at one time and Grandpa had lots of connections. He always had money, even during the Depression, and he got sugar and stuff like that by the train loads and would distill it down and make any kind of whiskey people wanted, like gin and stuff. He sold to the Indians and it was against the law to give any Indian a drink. He finally had all his money confiscated during the Depression and moved back to Baker County. He still had a lot of connections and I think he might have been the first one who really introduced hauling liquor out of the county . People around here just sold it to locals like in the Knabb turpentine camps and bars in Jacksonville. When they lived in West Palm Beach, Uncle Went and Uncle Streeter used to box for extra money. They were real strong men. I think my uncle Went was the youngest man ever to get sentenced to Chillicothe, Ohio, for moonshining.



**1936 Chevrolet used to haul whiskey**

"The family has always done it. Even since I was little, daddy would take me along in his car, loaded with shine. He'd tell me to wrap a pint of drinking liquor up in a doll blanket on our trips and he'd say, 'Now if we get stopped, you just act like this is your baby doll.' He did a lot of things to disguise and outsmart the law and sometimes we were right in there with him. Like the time daddy was relaxing on the front porch and he spied a rattlesnake crossing the lane toward a whiskey cache buried in a hole near where we children played in a playhouse to throw the lawmen off. Well, daddy grabbed his rifle and set out with us children to kill the snake. While we were beating the palmettos, Mr. Spanks and some other Federal agents drove up on the scene. They were always nice to daddy, and they stopped and asked daddy what was going on. Daddy told him about the snake and that he was trying to kill it because the kids played in the area. Well, they all got out and offered to help daddy find the rattler. Daddy was so scared they'd find that liquor, and he kept saying, 'The snake went that– away,' pointing in another direc-

tion. They were so near you could practically smell that liquor. Finally daddy told them he was tired of looking for the snake and he was going home, so they got in their jeep and left.

"Another time, daddy was out in the yard piling a bunch of trash from the yard in his old milk truck to haul away. He saw an airplane circling overhead, so he hollered for all us younguns' to quickly help him finishing piling all the trash in the truck. Daddy drove off with it down the road, and he didn't get too far before the old truck stalled and shut off. In a few minutes here come the law from everywhere and surrounded the truck. There were federal men, a state trooper, state men and the sheriff. They even had a loud speaker and said, 'Junior Rewis, we got you surrounded, come on out, we got you now.' Daddy had put an old pitch fork on the back of the truck and those lawmen got that and started going through all daddy's yard trash looking for whiskey and of course there weren't none to be found. It was only trash. Daddy laughed and laughed about that for years. Sometimes he'd just get to laughing and that's what he'd be thinking about.



**A Moonshine Still**
**Baker County Florida**

"In them days, all the roads were dirt and the only travelling you'd ever see out there in Taylor was a pulp wood truck and a mail man, and once in a while a car. People didn't travel the roads and, another thing, they didn't have gas to do it with, either. They didn't waste and squander because they didn't have it. So people didn't ride the roads unless they had real business. If you visited anyone you walked.

"So, when them revenuers came out there looking for the moonshiners, they tried to find tracks and signs just like a hunter does for a turkey or deer. Well, in order for us to get to the whiskey stills, we'd have to go either by horse or by wagon because we had to take sugar and all that stuff down there to make the liquor and we had to figure out how not to leave tracks. So when we'd leave home, daddy would take the broom with him and every so often he'd just stop and get out and sweep out the sign. You just never knew when the law would come driving by and if they saw the signs they'd know right where it was. If daddy had to cross the ditch he'd put him some planks down to drive across because lots of time they'd be water in the ditch.

"Daddy knew all kinds of ways to fool them. He'd put a still right by a hog pen because the lawmen knew hogs were bad to get in a still and they would never think daddy would put one there. He loved to outsmart them. Daddy always kept a dog and if it barked, he got up and looked around. Daddy had a still in the palmettos near our house and one night the revenuers were out there watching it. Daddy heard the dog bark and he got up and turned on the light. The revenuers saw daddy turn on the light and the next day daddy accidently ran into one of them. He slipped up and asked daddy if one of his children was sick in the middle of the night. He gave himself away and daddy never went back to that still 'cause he knew they'd be waitin'. They just eventually tore it up, but they didn't catch daddy.

"Daddy had a spiritual side. Once in a while he'd get us up and say, 'Ya'll get up. We're going to church, and we'd take off and go to D.L. Griffis's church and you never knew when he was going to do that. Just whenever the notion struck him. He'd set me on his knee and sing Amazing Grace, what few lines he knowed. You could feel that

spiritual side. I can't remember when I didn't want to go to church. I wasn't raised to go, but they had a little church up there at Baxter and it was just a little small thing, and Mr. Hassie Johns would come around and pick us up in the bus. They'd all be shoutin' because it was a holiness type, and I'd be kind of scared, you know, but I knowed I done the right thing. From day one, I knew I wanted to work for the Lord. One day they said that who ever brought the most new people to Sunday School would win a cake. I worked real hard and won, and Mrs. Dollie Burnsed gave me a cake. I can see my daddy now when I came in with that cake. He was so proud.



**Lonnie Rewis, Sr. 1960 with Bull Dog named Junior**

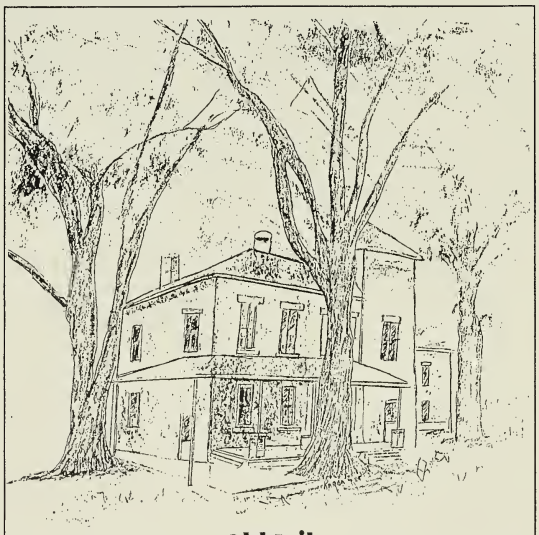
"Daddy was first arrested when he was 18 years old, and each time after he was always put on probation and let go. That changed in 1964.

"I still vividly recall the events when my daddy finally got sent off to prison. I was 14 and I thought it was so dirty because it was just when I needed my daddy because he was a real stability to us. He taught us everything because he was home with us all the time.

"I was at school that day. The day before, this man named Barnhill from Jacksonville that bought whiskey from daddy before, came up to the house and asked my daddy, 'You got some whiskey?' and my daddy said, 'Yeah, I got some,' and daddy took him back there to my bedroom and showed him what he had. My bedroom was always full of whiskey. I crawled over jugs to get in my bed every night because daddy said the law couldn't look in the house without a warrant.

"Anyway, Barnhill said he'd be back the next day. Before he left, he began to tell daddy how he'd got stopped by a state trooper on the way out, and the more he talked the more daddy got suspicious of him. After he left, daddy said, 'The more I think about him, the more I believe he's an undercover agent,' and he told us, 'Let's get the whiskey out.' So that night we moved all the whiskey out and put

it in a hole we had dug by the side of the road. Daddy kept whiskey in it most of the time and we had built a playhouse around it. Anytime the revenuers were around daddy would holler at us younguns', 'Ya'll get down there at that blankedy blank playhouse,' and we'd all go running down there. My grandpa Mitchell Rhoden was a peddler and he had given us all these crates and tin cans.



**Old Jail**

"Anyway, the next day here comes the law and they had a warrant and Mr. Barnhill was nowhere to be found. So, daddy takes them straight back there to my bedroom and there's no whiskey. So, as they were coming back through the house, they looked in my daddy's bedroom and he had some in a bottle sitting down by his bed. One of them spotted it and they took it out on the porch and arrested daddy for that little bit of drinking liquor and made a case against him. The Feds were there, too. They took him to Jacksonville and Mama came for us younguns' at school.

"That afternoon I was sitting on the front porch in the swing and Barnhill and some man came out and looked in the hole and stole all the whiskey. He'd figured out with his common sense what daddy had done with it, because he had bought whiskey before from daddy and he knew where the hole was.

"Daddy got a court–appointed attorney and all that because he had sense enough to know they'd drain him of what little money he had. Everyone thought we had money, but we didn't. Daddy had property and he owed on that."

Karon remembers the day her daddy was sentenced.

"Daddy had to be in court early, so he got up and dressed in the only suit he owned, which was a dark brown. He wore a light col-

ored shirt with it. He looked so nice, and he asked me if I liked it. He said his sleeves were too long, so I got out a needle and thread and fixed them for him. It was the first time I'd ever seen him in a suit and I felt fear rising in me, the greatest fear I've ever felt. I dressed in my best skirt and blouse, put on my penny loafers, brushed my hair and hoped daddy would approve of how I looked. I looked in our looking glass on the porch and noticed how plain my blouse looked so I took a ribbon from my doll's hair and pinned it on my blouse. The twinkle in daddy's eyes told me he liked how I looked and the ribbon had paid off.

"We drove to the Federal Court Building in Jacksonville in silence. My parents appeared to be worried. Daddy held my hand as we walked into the building and took the elevator up to the third floor. Daddy talked to his probation officer and attorney and mama and I just listened and looked at all the official–looking people coming in and out of the room. Then they called out that court was in session and the Judge began handing out five– and ten–year sentences. I saw daddy squirming nervously in his seat. I excused myself from the courtroom, as if to go to the restroom. Then I quickly ran to the car and removed a bottle of moonshine, poured a little in a cup and raced back to the third floor. I told the security guard that daddy was ill and needed to take his medication. He immediately summoned daddy outside the court room and daddy yelled, 'What in the blankedy blank do you want?'. I handed him the shine and he swallowed it in one big gulp. He said, 'Are you crazy, how in the blankedy blank did you get this up here?' I told him I'd lied to the guard. He hugged me and went back in the court room. Daddy looked more calm. He had thrown himself at the mercy of the court and we hoped for probation to be extended. The attorney signaled daddy to the Judge's bench along with his probation officer and the Judge began reading daddy's life history. I started praying from the bottom of my heart. The Judge's action in reading daddy's history made me sick to my stomach. Daddy stood with his hands behind him as the sentence was read. He showed no emotion when the Judge read, 'You have been charged with possessing and operating illicit distillery and possessing untaxed distilled spirits. Do you have anything to say before I sentence you, Mr. Rewis?' Daddy said, 'No, your honor.' Then the Judge said, 'You are to

be placed in an institution designated by the Attorney General for a period of 18 months.'

"I jumped from my seat and stumbled to the Judge's bench. I fell on my knees and screamed, 'Please don't take daddy away, oh no, oh no,' I yelled. The lawyer took me out of the crowded court room and I didn't even have an opportunity to say good– bye to daddy. I was crying and he drew me close and let me cry as if he understood. Then he took me to his office, closed the door. I shouted at him that he needed to have helped daddy. He told me I had his word of honor that he'd help daddy get home. I got up to go and then he shoved me back down in the chair and said, 'You're going to listen to me, you understand me, girl?' He said, 'You don't know every blankedy blank thing, so stop brooding.' I told him I was sorry and he assured me daddy would get paroled in a few months and be home before I knew it. He said to call him if he could ever do anything for me.

"I went and found mama, and then we went to the car and ignored each other the entire ride home, although I longed to share with her about taking daddy the shine. When we got home, I went straight to my room. I felt ashamed of falling at the Judge's feet and dramatically begging him not to take daddy away. I'd sacrificed not seeing daddy for the last time. I went to bed trying desperately to forget the day and fall asleep, but I couldn't. Daddy's face was before mine and there was no one to console me. The next morning it was raining. I went in and washed yesterday's dishes and was completely absorbed with the thoughts of daddy being gone. I was used to my bedroom having at least 25 jugs of liquor in the room, and the same in the smoke house, the corn crib, around in the woods and in the big hole by the play house. I wondered what life would be like for us now."

Lucile Rewis went to work at Northeast Florida State Hospital from 3 to 11 p.m. to provide for her family and save the farm. She applied for public assistance to feed her family. The children continued going to school and Junior began serving his time at Eglin Air Force Base in north Florida.

"I was real close to my dad. We had a bond I just can't explain. Everyone said I looked more like the Rewis family. I missed daddy and

could only imagine him in some prison hole that was dark. I was devastated and just cried and cried. I thought it was the end of the world for me.

"When we found out he had gone to Eglin Field I didn't know what it was or where it was. It could have been at the end of the world for all I knew. We never had gone anywhere. The only place we'd ever gone in our lives was to Jacksonville once in a while with Grandma Rewis to take her eggs off, otherwise we stayed home except to go to school or to my Grandpa Rhoden's house down the road or to Grandma Rewis's across the creek. We didn't ever go out to eat like at the Hotel Annie. We didn't have the money and if we went visiting daddy would never let us eat off of anybody's table, even if they offered, except for at Grandma and Grandpa's house. If we were visiting someone he'd make us sit there on the couch and he'd say, 'I told you to sit right there and keep your mouth shut.' And we did. So you can imagine how we all felt when we drove our blue Impala Chevrolet to Eglin Air Force Base. It's not a hop, skip and a jump, it's almost to Pensacola. When we got up there we saw all these barracks and no fence around the place. Daddy was out there in this big old pasture like and there is this big old thicket and no place to go if you run off. It was nothing like I had envisioned as a child. Once I saw it I thought, 'Well, he hasn't got it too bad' and I could deal with it. We'd go as often as we could.

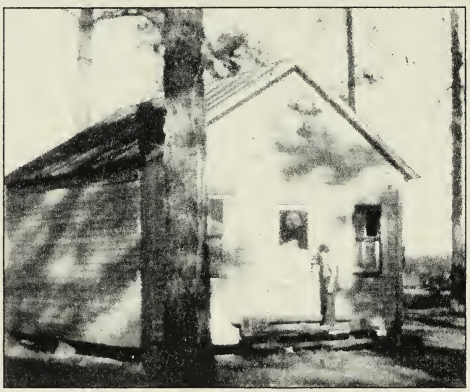
"Daddy never did learn how to read or write so he got someone else to write me a letter. He could sign his name, that's all.

"We kind of settled into a routine while we waited on daddy to come home. We took care of ourselves when we came home from school while mama worked late. I was in the 9th grade and I'd get up early, fix us something to eat, and take the baby over to Grandma's house, then come back and catch the bus to school. We didn't bother to wake mama, we just carried on like if daddy was there and do how he'd trained us. I was as scared of my daddy and him up in Eglin Field as I was if he had been there. I missed him and loved visiting him. It would seem so sweet when I'd see him and I can still smell his scent.

"While daddy was gone, I met William 'Billy' Marsh, from Taylor. He was over at my Grandma's house visiting my cousin, but he liked

me when he saw me and she already had another boy friend. He had just come home from training in the Marine Reserves. He was 17 and I was 14. He asked me if he could come visiting but I said 'No, my daddy is in Eglin' and he wouldn't like it. But I wanted him to come so bad. He sent me notes on the school bus by his cousin.

"One day Billy drove up in his Fairlane Ford and was sittin' there talking to me and my brothers and sisters while mama was at work and Uncle Went, who lived down the road, drove by. He rode shot gun on us, he and Grandma Rewis and all of 'em while daddy, they called him 'Junney,' was in Eglin Field. They all felt like they had to keep an eye on his younguns'. So that day Uncle Went came along, and he always would slow down and see what was going on at 'Junney's' place. Billy was there and Uncle Went put on brakes. I was scared to death of Uncle Went, too, and he pulled up there and said, 'Who in the blankedy blank is that in there?' and I said 'It's Billy Marsh.' And he said, 'Billy Marsh, What in the blankedy blank is he doing up here?' And I said, 'Well, he came up here to see my brother,' and he said, 'Tell him I said to get his blankedy blank out here.' I was so embarrassed, but Billy goes out there and Uncle Went said, 'Boy, what are you doing up here?' and Billy says 'I come up here to see the boys,' and Uncle Went said, 'Well, let me tell you one blankedy blank thing, you know Junney is gone, and you get in that car and you get your blankedy blank gone.' Billy said, 'Well, let me go tell them by,' and Uncle Went said, 'To blankedy blank with the boys, do what I told you.' So Billy left and I was so embarrassed I didn't know what I was going to do.



**The old country store at Taylor - owned and operated by Went Rewis**

"I just felt like I had to see him again, so I sent him a note and told him to park his car at the river and walk to the house. So he did and it rocked on that way the whole time daddy was in Eglin. Billy would

leave about a quarter to eleven, before mama got in. The other children didn't tell. Once in a while they'd threaten to, but I usually had something on them, so they didn't. My brother had a girl, too, and since he didn't have a car and Billy did, we decided to skip school and go to the beach one day. Me and Billy had our picture taken in one of those booths while we were there. Well, one day my brother got mad and told mama about me and Billy going; he didn't say he was there, too. I told mama he was lying. Well, one morning I dropped my purse before I got on the school bus, and mama got it and found the picture of me and Billy. When I came in from school, she started hollering, 'So he lied did he, well what's this?' and she showed me the picture. She wrapped that gallberry so hard around my legs it cut the blood from them. She whipped me so bad I couldn't even dress out at school they were so bad.

"You got to keep in mind we didn't never get to go anywhere like to Wheeless Drug Store in the afternoon after school. We were out there in Taylor on that darn farm and we thought we hated that place and couldn't wait to get away. Sometimes I'd ask daddy if I could go to a dance and daddy would say, 'You get your butt out there and dance around that blankedy blank cane patch with a big I–hoe,' and I'd think to myself, 'I hate him, I hate him.'

"Some of the boys in school liked me, but Taylor was in the boondocks, dirt roads all the way and no one could come after me anyway because the boys in town didn't have a car and their big deal was to walk up to the skating rink or the ball game. Billy had a car and he would come to visit and still park at the river. Everyone would tell him, 'You better stay away from Junior Rewis's house, he'll kill you when he gets out of that place,' but we still saw each other all the time. Finally daddy came home in six months and up came Billy with his black and white shoes on and all frocked up in a suit. He came right up there and asked daddy if he could take me out. Daddy looked at him and said, 'Well, I don't know. Why didn't you ask me while I was in Eglin?' Somehow, daddy knew everything that had gone on. He even knew Billy was parking at the river. Mama didn't even know that he had continued to do it, but somehow daddy knew, he just always knew everything. He let Billy take me out on dates and from that time on we dated about a year.



**1965 Wedding of Billy and Karon Marsh with Karon's parents Junior and Lucile Rewis**

"Then Billie went through the pains of asking daddy if he could marry me. Daddy said he could, but he hoped I'd finish school. I turned 15 in December and we got married in March. We've been married 30 years and have three children, Dana, Timmy and Dennis, and five grandchildren, Meggy Day Mann, Brittany, Courtney Lee, Ashton and Taylor Lee Marsh.

"Somehow taking a marriage on didn't seem overwhelming to me. I already had so many responsibilities. We married at my house. That afternoon before the wedding daddy took me over to Grandma Rhoden's house for a talk while everyone was at our house. In our house no one talked about sex; it was never mentioned. But that afternoon before I married, daddy said to me, 'Now listen, you don't want to have a baby time you get married because people will think you had to get married, and I don't want people to think you had to get married, so don't let that happen.' And I said 'okay.' I was so naive. I didn't really understand what made you get pregnant. I just knew I was supposed to keep my dress down, 'cause daddy would always say, 'Keep your dress down,' but now that I look back, I guess he thought Billy would know what to do and I'd go along with it. I was married a year when my first child, Dana, was born. They didn't have birth control pills when I married. All I knew was that I was in love, and all that daddy said about don't get pregnant just went out of my head.

"I dropped out of school, but I got my GED certificate and I've taken all kinds of courses such as computer. I'm a licensed massage therapist, bail bond, and child care specialist. I love my art classes. Lord, I've got so many diplomas at home for so many different things.

"I'm not the least bit ashamed of my daddy. He was everything to me. I started painting after my daddy died in 1974. I remember



**Taylor School**

when Mr. Gene Barber taught us to paint in elementary school, and I loved for him to come. He was so patient and kind. I'd get so upset on days when he didn't come. After daddy died, I got Mr. Barber to go out to our house and do a painting for me. When I went to pick it up I saw all these women in his class painting and I started doing it. It has given me a way to express how I feel about my life growing up in a moonshine industry environment.

"The whiskey business was good to us. My daddy was uneducated and when you stop to think about it, what was there to do if you didn't work in the bank, or you didn't work in the court house, or you didn't have a home–owned grocery store, or you wasn't a pulp wood man? What else could you do for a living? Once in a while you could get a job like paving a road, but that would be temporary. Daddy didn't have a lot of confidence because he didn't have any education. The fact he couldn't read or write was a handicap, but he had a lot of common sense. When he was home he had total confidence. Once in a while daddy would call himself going to be legitimate and he'd say he was through with making whiskey. A lot of people thought there was a lot of money and glory in making it, but it was a dangerous thing to be doing it, especially if you got caught and you had to leave your family and all that. He'd say he was going to get him a job and he would, but it was never enough money for his family. I remember once he got paid and his pay check was $50. I had been begging for a bicycle and he went and bought me one and it took his whole pay check to buy it. So there wasn't anything to do where he could make a living. Even the moonshine business just fed us and kept a roof over our head.

"Daddy made whiskey until 1972 and was on probation when he died in 1974. After he found out he had cancer, he died within six months, but he never complained. I think of him so much. When he

went away to prison he was everything to me, he was all of our stability, he was the one who showed the love, he was the one who insisted all of us be presentable, he didn't care if we had on saddle oxfords or boots, he wanted them clean, our hair combed, and for us to look clean. He would have liked to have had more money to give us for clothes and things, but if he had been a millionaire he wouldn't have cared about going in a restaurant and all that kind of stuff because he wasn't that kind of person. He was a home person, a person who loved children and his family.

"To go to Grandma and Grandpa Rhoden's house was like going to heaven 'cause you just knowed you could do anything and get away with it and nothing would be said. We romped on grandma's feather beds, had our fusses and fights and the strongest words my Grandpa Rhoden would say was, 'Hush, hush.'



**Mitchell Rhoden**

"Sometimes Grandma Rewis would tell daddy, 'Junney, them younguns' look puny to me,' or, 'I believe that youngun' is falling off' (meaning losing weight) and daddy would say, 'Ah, ain't nothing wrong with my younguns.' I always hated when she did that cause I knew what was coming. Daddy would get to worrying about it and he'd wonder if we had hook worms or something. Sometimes he might get to drinking a little and he'd come in and get us up even if it was 2 o'clock in the morning. I can hear him now, 'You younguns' get up. I believe you need a dose of castor oil,' or it might be a spoonful of turpentine with a dot of sugar or something. It might be that old SSS tonic, or Epsom Salts. If we didn't have any of what he thought we ought to be taking in our house we'd have to go over to Grandma's house and borrow it even if it was in the night. Whenever he was in the mood, we'd all have to take what ever he thought we needed. He didn't want anyone to think we weren't getting what we needed to eat or be healthy.

"We didn't have a lot, but somehow daddy always managed. I remember one time I cut my foot on a broken bottle. It was cut to the bone, and was laid wide open. We didn't have any money for a doctor, so daddy put me up on the water shelf and stuffed it full of flour to stop the bleeding. He wrapped it up in a bandage of some kind and everyday I had to hobble to Taylor School. Daddy didn't take me in the car because we didn't have the money for gas.

"As much as I love my daddy, I love the Lord more. I go into the prisons and have a ministry. I tell them, 'You haven't got it so bad.' I believe that anything that happens to you in your life can be turned around and used for God's glory, and I tell them that, and they listen. I don't go to the prisons for my glory, I go to share God's goodness and to glorify His name. I don't ever want any praise for anything I do for the Lord, I've definitely been led to do the prison ministry and it is a blessing for me to be a part of it.

"I don't believe in judging anyone, we all have faults, and we're all guilty of something. Some of us get caught and some don't. If God judged us, like people do, we may all be in some kind of prison. Sometimes we just don't have an understanding of things.

"I remember one time a preacher visited my daddy, and he said, 'Junior do you know where you're going when you die?' and my daddy looked at him and said, 'I guess I'll go to Brinkley's Funeral Home.' Daddy just didn't have any spiritual background and didn't know or understand what he was talking about.

"The inmates give to me as much as I give to them, maybe more. I enjoy the interaction. I'm uplifted greatly when I go. It's a joyful, growing experience. They have a lot to offer and I find those who come to our Bible study humble and repentful. So very many of them are talented people. Some are musically inclined, some are very artistic. They are a joy to be around."

Karon is an active member of the Macedonia Church. She spends countless hours going to nursing homes and entertaining the residents by singing to them.

"I live for the Lord. He is my life and my life is His. He is my stability today and tomorrow and I just praise Him and thank Him for my blessings.

"I had a good life. That life matured me far beyond my years and the way I live my life today is motivated by my childhood. Sometimes I say, 'Now I wonder how daddy would handle this?' and it helps me to know how to handle problems because I know what he would have done. He taught me well. He taught me to be honest with myself."

When asked about the moral issue of moonshine, Karon has strong feelings.

"If a man has to go over the speed limit because of an emergency, he has broken a law but he cannot be accused of doing wrong. No, making moonshine liquor is not right for everybody, but it was right at the time and under the circumstances for my daddy. It wasn't that he was against the laws, but just as the 'Revenuers' had a job to do, so did he, feeding his family and getting ahead.

"He farmed, accumulated land and encircled his children in love, trust, and responsibility. In the 'shine business we learned to depend on one another for survival, and we developed loyalty within our family. Morality? Yes, we had morality, and a lot more. And we have a family legacy we are proud to be a part of."

If Karon Marsh is hiding behind a mask with her cheerful disposition and sunny personality, it would take an army of psychiatrists to detect it. If her past life has left a visible scar, you can't see it. Her life, as she sums it up, was destined to be what it was, and what it is. She feels she has been given the life God wanted her to have, and she has made from it what she feels God wants her to make from it.

Karon is quick to see the beauty and opportunities for good in her experiences, where others, she said, may be quick to see the blemishes and distort it to be bad. Her favorite Bible scripture, Romans 8:28 is her banner:

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

She believes she has been called according to His purpose, and all things have been, for her, very good. She expresses it in one of the many expressions she has been inspired to write such as this one about her father.

**Dear Daddy:**
As I see your picture on the wall,
my mind goes back. I recall
We were all together, love was there,
Sometimes without money But we didn't care
Tears stream down my face,
there's no one that could take your place
Years have gone by, everything has changed
Our home is just a house, nothing remains
I see your bright eyes and feel the touch of your hand
Where you made tracks on this land
Maybe it's true God knows best,
I believe Daddy you are at rest,
Someday Daddy you will see,
We'll all be together forever to be.
Days won't be dark, we'll be home,
together with you Where we belong.
I'll meet that same sweet face and take you by the hand
Then we'll stroll away in a peaceful land.
I miss and love you, words cannot say
Without you it seems like just another day.

**NOTE**

Karon Rewis's heritage descends from Malachi "Mack" and Levicely Rewis, who came from upper Ware County, Ga., to the Great Bend of the Saint Mary's River in the 1840s. Levicely was a widow of the Civil War.

Her Irish Rhoden lineage came from Coffee County in the early nineteenth century before entering Trader's Hill area. Karon also descends from Noah Davis family of Baker County.

# Jenell Rewis Heath*

**Taylor, Florida**

*"I remember when I went to school the next day after they shot daddy, people were surprised. They said they didn't think I would come to school so soon. I said, 'Why, nobody shot me!"*

**Jenell Rewis Heath**

*"Daddy used to tell us, if anyone asked us kids what he did for a living, just say 'traffic and trade.'"*

**Jenell Rewis Heath**

*"Sunday was the Lord's day and no one did business on Sunday."*

**Jenell Rewis Heath**

*"I considered my Grandma a very necessary person in my life, and I considered my Grandpa a thinker of wise teachings. My mother was a person of integrity and moral character. My father was a person of courage, street–wise and worldly. I still rely on things each one taught me."*

**Jenell Rewis Heath**

Jenell Rewis grew up in Taylor, Florida, the daughter of Wintford 'Wint' and Myrel Williams Rewis. Her father was thrust into the moonshine business when he was a youth, and eventually led big–time gambling operations in Baker and surrounding counties. How it affected Jenell is told by her in this observation as well as her outlook on society then and now.

Today, Jenell runs a million–dollar golf business in Orlando and is a very successful businesswoman and mother. Her heritage in Baker County is one of pride. She is the granddaughter of the late Lonnie and Bessie Rewis, Sr.

## An observation

"I was born in 1939 at the closing of the Great Depression, so I don't know anything about that but what I was told. However, I am very familiar with some of the fall-out of the Depression. Every time a young person was planning to get married, at least three different people would comment that the boy in question was too lazy to feed the girl. People, then, put a lot emphasis in having food, and that rather puzzled me. I thought, 'Who needs someone to feed them? I can feed myself,' and i couldn't think of one person that I knew that was hungry.

"Finally, I asked an aunt why they always made comments about putting food on the table. She said it was because they were hungry back in the Depression.

"That was alien to me. My teen years were the '50's, better known as the years of prosperity.

"Looking back, I can see that those were good years to grow up. The second World War ended in 1945 and the country was in a growth mode. The years of industry and factories were in and people had jobs. The sort of crime we know about today didn't exist in Baker County. The only drugs we knew about were cigarettes and whiskey, and only adults indulged in that. Kids didn't run things then, like they do now. It was unheard of for a parent not to know where his child was. We didn't have all these so-called rights. We had a right to keep our mouth shut until we were asked to speak. We had a right to go to school, if we obeyed the teacher and gave respect to whom it was due. We had a right to bed and board if we worked and did what was understood by God and man alike.

"In return, my parents were always home. Nobody left me by myself, or let any harm come to me. The streets were safe and we could sleep with our windows open without fear. I was never denied anything that I had a real need of. I was taught the difference between a need and a want early in life and that has served me well.

"My mother, Myrel Williams Rewis, was a person who liked the printed word. She was good at it and she was a person with integrity and high moral values. She did her best to teach that to her family.

"My father, Wintford Rewis, was a person you didn't tell 'no' to a lot. He didn't know a lot about a book, but he knew people and how to survive, and he tried to teach us that. Personally I think they both did a good job.

"I think how nowadays, people call that tough love –– learning to pay the price of your actions.

"Back then, it was simply just a way of life. We didn't have set rules except one. The adults were the sole authority. We were the children and it was kept that way. Other than that, you did whatever was necessary to get where you needed to be. What worked today may not work tomorrow. That was my daddy's way. It taught me to think, to discern and to develop wisdom.

"I remember that folks used to speak well of a person who didn't talk much and was quiet as far as talking went. They even had a saying for it, 'Empty wagon's rattle most.' Folks seemed to think if a person was quiet, they were listening to others, therefore they knew more.

"One day my daddy said, 'There ain't but two reasons for a man not to talk. One, he don't know a damn thing or, two, he can't afford to talk.'

"I thought about that and I decided he had something there, and it has been my experience that the second reason is more often the reason.

"When I was growing up people didn't hand out so many material things. What all you had didn't count so much in your development. What they did hand out a lot were lessons in life. A lot of wisdom was taught. They wanted you to think because they knew that your mind and character would serve you well all your days.

"My Grandma and Grandpa, Lonnie and Bessie Rewis, lived right across the creek from our home and I always liked going there. Grandma was funny and made me laugh a lot. She was a woman who lived in the present. She kept her mind on today, and she was always watching out for me. She was the type to uphold what she considered right or wrong, especially with her grandchildren. My Grandpa didn't try to make me right if I was wrong, but he did imply that I would receive a full pardon without question. He seemed to think it his job

to talk to me and show me a better and wiser way. He would tell me, 'Honey, what you have in your head, no man can steal. If you gain great material riches, you could lose it, but if you gain great wisdom and knowledge, you can use it to gain great riches again.'

"I considered my Grandma a very necessary person in my life and I considered my Grandpa a thinker of wise teachings.

"My mother was a person of integrity and moral character. My father was a person of courage, street–wise and worldly.

"I still rely on things each one taught me.

"Back in the days when I grew up in Baker County, most of the people made or hauled moonshine whiskey, or someone in their family did at one time or another. That, and farming, were about all there was unless you had some sort of education and even then, them kind of jobs were few and far between.

"My daddy made some money at making shine. We lived pretty good for then. We had a Delco system for electricity, a gas stove, a gas refrigerator and a gas iron. Most people didn't have any of that. I was a teen–ager when electricity came through the area.

"My daddy grew up in the moonshine business. When my grandpa, Lonnie Rewis, started to lose his eyesight, my daddy started driving for him. Daddy told me once that he was hauling whiskey down the state when he was just a teen–ager.

"I understand that my daddy made and hauled moonshine a lot when I was real small, but I don't remember any of that. Mama said that once daddy got worried that the law was on to him, so he loaded up the whiskey, put blankets over it and put us kids asleep on it. He took her, too. Sure enough, the law stopped him, but when they saw her and us kids asleep in the back, they told him to go on, without looking any farther.



**Home of Lonnie Rewis, Sr. (Back row, l-r): Lonnie Rewis, Jr., James Went Rewis, Chub Rewis. (Front row, l-r) Toney Burssa, Lonnie Rewis, Sr., Streeter Rewis**

"By the time I was old enough to know anything, my daddy wasn't making the

whiskey himself, or hauling it, but he ran the operation. I never saw any moonshine until I was almost grown. It was in a quart jar and it looked like water to me. I soon knew it wasn't water when daddy used it to start a fire. I never saw a moonshine still, only parts of one. However, I did know it was going on. Daddy was paying others to make it and he had drivers who hauled it. It was daddy's money, his truck and his connections. He would be gone for a week, then he would be back for a week or two before he was gone again.

"On one of these trips, he got shot. I guess I was in about the 6th grade. A policeman in Miami was the one who shot him.

"Daddy's cousin, Vernon Rewis, was driving the truck, so when the telegram came to Macclenny that Rewis had been shot, we didn't know which one it was, daddy or Vernon.

"I remember my Uncle came to tell Mama she better get ready in case it was daddy, that he was trying to find out which one it was. We knew something was bad wrong when we saw my uncle coming, because he was driving real fast on a dirt road and no one did that.

"They soon found out it was daddy. He had eight holes in his intestines. Some of my aunts and uncles went with Mama to Miani. When they got there they had chains on daddy in the hospital bed. The doctor was upset about it. He said, 'The man can die because he is in serious condition.'

"My uncle went ballistic when he saw how they were doing daddy.

"The policeman that shot him claimed daddy had a gun, but that was a lie. Daddy didn't own a gun. He hated guns. As it turned out, a lady on the street saw the whole thing. She said when the policeman stopped daddy, that daddy got out of his car and walked toward the policeman. She said that the policeman pulled his gun and shot him without any cause at all. She began screaming and then another woman came up and made them call an ambulance. They just let him lay there. If it had not been for the two women, daddy would have died. The police gave a different story to the news people, but that lady came forward and said the policeman was lying.

"Daddy got okay, and the police had to give him back his property. My uncle wanted daddy to sue the Miami Police Department, but daddy just wanted out of there.

"After that, daddy lost his taste for running moonshine and as far as Miami, he never went back there. He didn't mess with any more moonshine, either.

"I remember when I went to school the next day after they shot daddy, people were surprised. They said they didn't think I would come to school so soon. I said, 'Why, nobody shot me.' They said, 'But your daddy might die,' and I said, 'No, he won't, he has four kids to feed. God knows that, so he won't die.' And so God didn't let him die.

"Daddy used to tell us if anyone asked us kids what he did for a living, just say, 'Traffic and trade.' I always just said, 'Ask him. He knows more about his business than I do. I just go to school.'

"After daddy got out of the moonshining business, he went into gambling. That was illegal too, but so were many of the people who were being paid to uphold the law. They were being paid to look the other way.

"They called it Cuba, because the number came from Cuba, that is until Castro took over Cuba. After that the number came from New York City. The number was called Bolita.

"The man who ran the number in an area was referred to as 'The Man.' That man had people he called writers. They wrote the gambling tickets.

"A lay–off man was someone in the business who was very powerful and who had large sums of money.

"Then they had a thing they called 'Night House.' And it is just like the name says. Small wooden balls were placed in a cloth bag that was pitched to someone in the crowd. A rubber band was put around the ball while it was still in the bag. Then all the balls would be emptied out and the ball with the rubber band was the ball that revealed what the number was.

"That was done every night, except for Saturday and Sunday. It was always done in someone's home. What the pay–off on that number was, was left up to 'The Man.'

"Bolita payoff was on Saturday across the nation as far as I know.

"Sunday was the Lord's day. No one did business on Sunday. That may sound strange, seeing that it was illegal. But those people were different than one might think. They didn't see it as wrong. They felt it was their business and it didn't hurt anyone. It was just fun to them. They could make a whole night out of $1. They also felt the government didn't have any business sticking its nose in their business.

"Today, we have Lotto that is legal because the state says it is. Over half the legal businesses are open on Sunday. Sunday does not mean a thing to them. But I am here to tell you, them so called 'criminals' did no business on Sunday. They would say, 'No, siree', that's the Lord's day. My people were Hardshell Baptist. They didn't steal, or tell tales on their neighbors. My Mama and Daddy didn't tell anything about their neighbors or anyone else. They were big on people minding their own business.

"My Grandpa used to tell me if I didn't have a good word I could say about a fellow, then I shouldn't say anything.

"This much I know. Moonshine or gambling, people lived cleaner lives back in the '50's than they do today. Things that teenagers do today would have shocked the world back then, and the things done to them by adults would also have shocked the world. In those days, the people in Baker County did what they could to survive, but they were not criminals. They did not rob, kill, rape, or molest children. They didn't kidnap them, or steal them and sell them. They didn't give birth to a child and stuff them in a garbage can or leave them at a hospital full of cocaine and never come back.

"They did not even think to kill their own child. Today, it is commonplace. Today, children kill children. Going to school is unsafe. It would never have entered my mind to be afraid of going to school, or that a teacher would molest me The worst thing that could happen was my teacher [would] send me to the principal's office and he would tell my daddy. The worst thing another student would have done is push me. The worst thing that ever happened to

me was I got my butt whipped. Today, they want to take a child away from a parent that spanks a child.

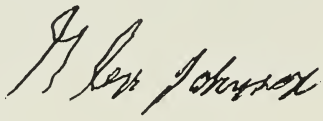
"My grandpa told me a yarn about a fellow who was the worst man in the county and when the man died, all the men were standing around and it being the custom to speak well of the dead, they were all trying to think about something good the man did. For a long time, no one spoke. Then, finally, a man spoke up and said, 'Well, boys, he could have been worse.' So that spoke well of the man doing the talking. I figured my Grandpa told me that yarn to make his point, because I was sure he didn't know of any such man.

"Parents, today, need to make an effective point and leave a rich heritage of wisdom and knowledge for their children."

# Glen Johnson
## Macclenny, Florida

*"I was headed north of Sanderson to pick up enough of shine to fill a semi. I saw someone with a flashlight when I drove up. Suddenly the door of the truck was opened and a man said, 'I'm a Federal officer.' He ought not to have said that."*

*"At one time, it was a tight–knit group and everyone could be trusted, but it just got out of hand."*



Back in the early '50's, law enforcement officers found it difficult to out–run, or out– smart the shrewd and ofttimes daredevil men who made a living in the moonshine industry. Glen Johnson was one of them. Tall, lean, and masculine, handsome and personable, he earned a reputation as being fast as a speeding bullet on the highways and byways of the moonshine trails. With his 'souped–up' Chryslers and Cadillacs, it was almost futile to try and stop him once he got started, so when law enforcement officers saw him coming, they got out of his way. Road blocks parted to let him through, lawmen marveled at his nerve, and his fame spread.




**Boston Dicks, Driver and Glen Johnson**

Glen Johnson was the man to hire

if you wanted moonshine safely hauled out of the county. He was trustworthy, he was smart, and he was capable. So it was no wonder that many of the top men in the moonshine industry hired him to work for them.

He was two years old in 1930 when he moved with his parents, Riley and Ann Gibbs Johnson, to Baker County from Mount Vernon, Georgia. They settled in south Macclenny and Riley Johnson did odd jobs to support his family. He died when Glen was 12 years old and left behind three additional children, Margaret, Laverne, and George, for his wife, Ann, to care for alone.

Glen was about 15 years old when he dropped out of school in the fifth grade. He went to work driving an ice truck for Lawrence Douberly. His top wage was $24 a week. He was 17 years old when he entered the world of the moonshine industry, a fast-growing, fast-buck operation that at one time touched the lives of almost every family in Baker County.

"At that time, I was sorta the man of the house -- or thought I was," he said. "Mama knew I was hauling it, but she didn't approve of it. One time, my younger brother, George, wanted to go with me and I remember mama saying, 'Glen, don't take that youngun' with you, you gonna get him killed,' and no doubt she was right about that. I was young and crazy."



**Glen Johnson ca 1950**

Glen said he hauled moonshine as far away as Virginia, loading up his vehicle with five-gallon jugs that had been stashed away by the moonshine makers in the woods. Or, he said, he sometimes went directly to the stills for his load. Occasionally, he gathered the cache from various areas until the car, truck, van or semi was loaded.

"Sometimes I drove a car with two carburetors, sometimes four and some-

times six. It wasn't a matter of slowing down if I needed to; sometimes I couldn't slow down if I wanted to," he said.

Former Baker County Sheriff Ed Yarbrough agreed. "Sometimes I wondered if he had eight carburetors," he said.

Yarbrough said he could only remember one incident with Johnson, personally, but he knew of his reputation. "Most law men just got out of his way. He drove like crazy and nobody was willing to risk their life to catch him," he said.

"I remember stopping him once and he didn't have a driver's license. I took him right on to the judge right then , but that was about all the dealings I had with him. He was driving a big old Chrysler and the seats had been removed. I remember that well," he said.

Yarbrough said he remembered an incident concerning Johnson told to hirn by state troopers. "I wasn't in on the chase, but they had blocked the road somewhere around Turkey Creek and when they saw him coming with his lights off, they just got out of his way because he was crazy. He went straight on across the Highway 90 and 121 intersection and shot through the red light at 120 miles an hour with his lights off and went right on into Georgia."

Yarbrough's deputy, G.W. Rhoden, encountered Johnson one night. "I didn't know who was driving, but I suspected it was Glen," he said. "He was driving a Dodge car with a Chrysler motor in it. If you ever got after him, he'd get away from you most of the time and he probably would have gotten away that time, but the alternator or something went out on him.

"I was parked up there on the Baxter Road that goes to Fargo, and he passed by. I started trailing him and he started going speeds up to 130 miles per hour. I started closing in on him because he was having some car trouble. He turned off all the car lights except the one that was specially installed that would show that yellow streak in the road just enough he'd know he was straddling the middle line of the road. After he turned out his lights, I turned out my lights so he couldn't tell if I was following. I was going 130 miles per hour. He stopped his car in the ditch when it malfunctioned and ran off leaving behind the 250 gallons of shine he was hauling."

Johnson said that he remembers the incident well. "Dub Sands had fixed the car up, and I told him I didn't think the carburetor was putting out and I didn't think the car was going to run right, but he thought it was okay. After Rhoden got to running me and I got up to speeds of about 95 miles per hour, it just went out on me. I just pulled it over in the ditch and ran, leaving the whiskey behind. Dub and them were following behind me and they came back later and picked me up."

Vince Smallwood, who retired as a major with the Florida Highway Patrol in 1985, remembers Johnson well during the time he was a trooper stationed in Duval, and later Baker counties. "Glen provided a lot of excitement for law enforcement officers all over north Florida and south Georgia. I have listened to many high speed chases over the FHP car radio with Glen leading the pack with his Dodge 'shine car' with the Chrysler engine," he said. "Being restricted to my assigned beat or territory, as we called it in Duval County, with the high speed chase in counties west and south of where I was, you could always tell if it was Glen Johnson that they were chasing by the description of the car he was driving and the fearless or crazy way he drove at speeds up to 140 miles per hour or more with his headlights off.

"I have been parked by the highway several times when the hot Dodge he drove came by wide open and it would be out of sight before I got started good. The only personal encounter with Glen that I can recall happened one night while I was listening to a high speed chase that started around Gainesville. Glen was headed for Macclenny with numerous officers in pursuit. I stretched the county line on US 90 slightly and was on 121 south of Macclenny when the high speed chase came through Lake Butler. I stopped in the middle of the Turkey Creek Bridge south of Macclenny with my emergency lights flashing to block the road where Glen couldn't pass, and waited.

"I could hear the tires whining on Glen's Dodge. It sounded like the whine of tires on a heavily–loaded semi. I couldn't see him because he was driving without headlights. My experience told me that his car was doing 140 miles per hour or more. I knew from experience that slowing down or stopping was not in Glen Johnson's vocabulary, so I accelerated rapidly and pulled off the bridge just barely in

time as Glen came by like a blue streak and passed through town, crossing Main Street without slowing. Three minutes later he was in Georgia. Our FHP vehicles could not match the speed of his Dodge.

"It was kind of an unwritten custom or code among law enforcement officers that if a bootlegger out-ran a patrol car, we did not get an arrest warrant for him -- you simply waited until 'next time'."



**Glen Johnson**

Reflecting on the past, Johnson said, "I really enjoyed outrunning the law and I think they kinda enjoyed it too. It was like a cat-and-mouse game with us."

He especially remembers the countless brushes he had around Tallahassee with the late Florida Highway Patrol Director, Eldridge Beach.

"He was on the Beverage Department for awhile, and we had lots of races, but I'd always out-run him," he said.

"Well, almost always," he noted. "I had let a friend ride with me on a haul and I shouldn't have done it. He was innocent, just wanting to go along for the ride. I had warned him it might get him into trouble, but he wanted to go anyway. We had passed through Madison with no problems until we saw this policeman sitting in his car up under the filing station. I said to my friend, 'I guarantee he is going to come after us,' and just as I got out of sight on the curve, I saw him shoot out. Of course, there was no problem outrunning him, so I just switched off my tail lights and went on, but when we got to Monticello, I told my friend, 'Well, if they ain't got the road blocked in Monticello, we'll have it made.' I had five gallons of gas in the back of my car and I was running early with the load, so I stopped and poured the gas in my car, in case I might have another race.

"Well, they'd done called Beach in Tallahassee by this time. They told him it was either a Lincoln, Cadillac, or Chrysler, but they described it as a big, dark, colored car coming that way. I ran into

Beach waiting for me just out of Tallahassee and when I looked up he was right there next to my car. I could have stuck my hand out and touched his. We skirted fenders along there. You had to light up on the Chrysler to get it up to 80 miles an hour, so he knocked me off the road and I went on down there in the bushes. I don't know how I managed to get it back on the road, but I did, and when I came up on the road, I hit the tail end of his car and turned him around sideways and pushed him off on a little old road. I went into the ditch and jumped out and ran. My friend couldn't get out on the passenger side, he had to crawl out behind me, so Beach ran up and grabbed him. I heard my friend shout, 'Damn it, turn me loose. You done shot me.' I didn't know if he had or not, but I ran on so I could call back to Baker County for someone to come get us.

"Well, my friend had been shot through the back of the neck and the bullet came out the right cheek. I went to the hospital the next day, so did a bunch of 'em from home. Beach was there too, but he didn't know I was the one driving the car. I was all stove up from the accident, but he didn't notice. The doctor told us that if the bullet had gone one quarter inch more to the left, it would have been fatal."

A news article reporting the incident related that the man was wounded after Beverage Supervisor Eldridge Beach forced his car off the road east of Tallahassee. Beach said one of the occupants of the auto shot at him and he returned the fire, hitting the man in the back of the neck.

The Leon County Sheriff quoted the man as saying the car had backfired as it was driven off the road and that no shot had been fired at Beach.

And that, said Glen, was the truth. No shots had been fired.

Johnson abandoned his car and the state confiscated the 150 gallons of moonshine he left behind.

"It was a dangerous job. Back then I was young and foolish. I ain't sorry I done it, I did it for about 13 years. In fact, just about anything you could mention, I done some of it and most of it was crazy and foolish. I got credit for doing a lot of things I didn't do, and of course there was a lot of things I didn't get credit for that I done," he said.

Johnson was present when the big raid was made in north Baker County that closed down one of the largest underground moonshine still operations.

"I had been to Harley Thrift's house and picked up 123 five-gallon jugs of shine and headed on out north of Sanderson to pick up enough to fill a semi. I saw someone with a flashlight when I drove up, and suddenly the door of the truck was opened and a man said, 'I'm a Federal officer.' He ought not to have said that," said Johnson. "We scuffled around there a little bit and he came on up in the truck with me. I finally got the door opened and I don't know whether he turned me loose or I broke loose, but anyhow we scrambled around a little on the dirt and I broke and got away. I was arrested the next day, but three years later I got off and so did all the others that they had arrested.

"I made good money and I blew it all." he said.

Johnson admits living in the fast lane in more ways than one. "I had a lot of luck because I drove like something crazy. You couldn't put all the pills I took in a car. I took all kinds of pills, anything that would keep me awake. I took reducing pills, prescription pills, over-the-counter pills, and any kind I could find," he said.

A marriage in 1955 resulted in three children. His profession was not easy for a family. The marriage broke up in 1970. So did the moonshine industry.

"It just lost something. People began to tell on each other and turn each other in. At one time, it was a tight-knit group and everyone could be trusted, but it just got out of hand. Right after I got involved in it, I worked almost exclusively for Junior Crockett. He was a square shooter, never asking you to do anything he wouldn't do, nor would he treat you any other way than the way he wanted to be treated," he said.

Johnson said he took his first and only flight on an airplane at the insistence of his friend, Junior Crockett. "I told him I didn't want to go, that I was scared to get on that plane." Crockett convinced him to go despite his protests.

"When that plane started up, there was a red light that started blinking and I thought for sure it was getting ready to fall right then.

That was my last plane ride, but Junior was always inviting me to go on trips with him. He liked to do things for you and he never expected any favor in return. He was just a nice guy to everyone and I've never met anyone that didn't like him. He always treated me fair, paid me many times much more than we had agreed on. I knew he would have helped me all he could if I needed it, and still would today if I called him."

With the state and federal government in constant pursuit, fines getting stiffer, and prison sentences longer through new laws being enacted, Johnson began to seriously think about slowing down his moonshine career. He was offered a job in 1967 working for Ray Gatlin at Blair's Nursery, driving a semi. This time he would be hauling nursery stock.

"Sometimes I worked as many as 80 hours without sleeping, driving that semi for the nursery all the way to New York. I could take one of them pills and get as far as Richmond, Virginia, then take another one and run on to New York, going about 56 hours without sleep."

Today, Johnson lives in a mobile home about three miles north of Sanderson with some friends. His health is broken, funds are out, except for Social Security, and he finds little to do with his time. Except for a few of his friends who faithfully come by and keep in touch, he doesn't roam far from home. He often frequents the local tavern in downtown Sanderson where he likes to reminisce about his moonshine days with those willing to listen.

"I could tell you a lot more," he muses. "I never ratted on nobody and don't plan on starting it now. They can tell their own story. One thing is for sure, I didn't save any money. I was broker when I quit than when I started. Like I said, I was young and foolish."

Even the young and foolish can make and leave legends, and as long as there is a story to be told about the moonshine days in Baker County, Glen Johnson's name will come up.....like the one I heard the other day -- 'Well, you see it was like this: He came storming through Glen St. Mary one night with his car lights out and his engine wide open, the law chasing right behind. And I saw him when he shot around the corner, his hub caps a flying in the air, and like a flash in the night he was gone, travelling on down the road with his load of shine, and the law officers all left behind.

# Hamp Register

## SANDERSON, FLORIDA 1995

*"It was my still, and my still alone, and there was no television or furniture in it. All that speculation was just loose talk."*

*"They blowed that still up with dynamite. I was so upset I didn't want to think about that thing anymore."*

Hamp Register

*"They'd sweeten that river two or three times when the boat would turn over. They'd come out of there so disappointed because they'd lost their sugar."*

Lettie Register

Seventy-seven-year-old Hamp Register sits in the living room of his modest frame home north of Sanderson looking westward across a vast pasture where a mixed breed of roaming cattle graze. In the distance he can see the simple home where his 93-year-old mother, Daisy Harris Register, lives. To the south flows the cool, dark waters of Cedar Creek beneath an old plank bridge. Up and down sandy Hamp Register Lane, that passes in front of his dwelling, he is surrounded by five generations of his family.

**Lettie and Hamp Register at home in 1995**



Amid triumph and tragedy, this son of a poor, but honorable and hard-working tenant farmer has amassed a 900-acre family compound by the sweat of the brow. He is more than just a tobacco farmer, cattleman, dairy farmer, timberman and rancher. He is also a former moonshiner and this is his story, and that of his wife, Lettie.

"We were just two sharecropper's children, and didn't get much education," he said. "We've stayed right here and put all this together, and I work right on just like I always did. The way I look at it, and have always looked at it, if I can work for you and make you a living, then why can't I skimp around here and do something for myself, and that includes making a little shine. It helped me get the land to grow the timber that made us a living. I get up at 6 o'clock every morning, and work until the sun goes down. I ain't proud of it, but it was a way of life. I'd do anything to feed and support my family, and that's why I did it."



**Bart and Daisy Harris Register parents of Hamp Register**

Hamp came with his parents, Bart and Daisy Register, to Baker County from Union when he was about 16 years old. They settled on land north of Macclenny, near the present-day Thrift sawmill.

"That's where I grew up," he said. "Mr. T.J. Knabb had died, and daddy looked after the place for a Mr. Howard, who was some kin to Mrs. Leona Knabb."

Bart and Daisy Register had five children -- Hamp, Tommy, Alma Lee, Sadie and Pauline.

" Daddy run about five or six mules and I plowed along with the rest of 'em from sun- up to sun-down," he said. "There were several pieces of land daddy tended for the Knabbs , so wherever we were plowing, we'd take an hour off at noon and walk home and get dinner. At one o'clock we'd walk back and go to plowing again until the sun went down, at least until you couldn't see it."

He was able to attend Garrett school until it was moved to Macclenny. It was there he met and fell in love with Layton and Zilphia Thrift Crew's daughter, Lettie. Lettie's family were sharecroppers who lived across the field from the Registers.

"It was in walking distance, and his sister, Sadie, was one of my very good friends, so that gave me a good excuse to go see him," said Lettie. "That's kinda how courtin' was done back then."

"Sometimes, they'd be a medicine show come to town and I remember a bunch of us children would walk into Macclenny and see it," said Hamp. "They had some kind of old screen they'd set out and show one of those movies that didn't have no sound. They peddled all kinds of liniment," he said.

Hamp went as far as the eighth grade in school and Lettie the sixth. "I had to quit and help work because daddy got sick," said Lettie. "I had two brothers and two sisters younger than I was. For a while, I worked at a dime store making $4.50 a week."

The young couple married when Hamp returned from a two-year stint with the CCC camp where he was able to save about $75. They were married in Folkston, Georgia, on October 16, 1938. She was 17 and he was 21.

"Back then, they didn't have all them laws and rules. If you wanted to get married you could," said Lettie. "When we came back and told our families, we were welcomed. We stayed with my parents because back then that was common. It was just expected."



**Layton and Zilphia (Thrift) Crews parents of Lettie Register**

The young couple helped plow and work on the Crews' farm until Hamp took a job working for Fraser's Nursery for $1.25 a day.

"We moved south of Macclenny and rented the Earn Rhoden place, which was a little old frame house that had wooden shutters to

cover the windows and a fireplace for heat. It had no indoor plumbing or electricity," she said, " but we bought us some furniture from Sears Roebuck, and Hamp walked to work everyday.

"We didn't realize that those days were bad, because we lived just like most other people did," she said.

When Hamp had an opportunity to go to work for Marion Construction Company making 30 cents an hour, he took it. "That was a considerable better job," said Lettie.

"When I first started working with the company, it was back when they limited the hours you could work," said Hamp. "When I was helping to build SR 301 we could make 42 hours a week. If I made the 42 hours I made $12 a week.

"I rode to work with a man who was foreman. Later, I rode with another man, in the back of his pickup and I remember I liked to have froze to death."

Tragedy struck one day at work when the work crew was clearing the road right–of– way of stumps with a cable. In a freak accident, his fingers were mangled and he lost three of them on his right hand. He was rushed to St. Lukes Hospital where all efforts were made to save his fingers, but after five days they had to be amputated. Fortunately, his thumb and forefinger remained intact.

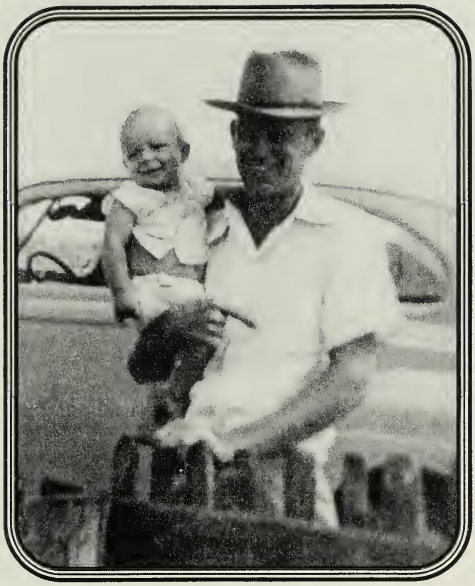
When the insurance company settled with Hamp for the loss of his fingers, he bought his first car, said Lettie.

"Back then they had just started workman's compensation. They paid him so much per finger that he lost," she said. "They figured I'd lost 50 peer cent use of my hands," said Hamp.

"He bought him an old Model–A Ford," said Lettie. "And we've never been without a car since then," she said.

"I followed the construction work until our first son, Sonny, was about five years old," said Hamp. "I didn't want Sonny moved around from school to school like he would be when my job didn't last long in one place and we had to move on, so I just quit, and we moved back to Macclenny and in with Lettie's parents again."

Hamp took a job with the Jacksonville Shipyards and bought a car. "I was trading with Ray Dinkins, buying gasoline, going back and forth to work," said Hamp. "One day Ray said to me,'Hamp, I got a farm



**Hamp Register and his son Terrell on family farm north of Sanderson**

out yonder I want to sell you,' and I said, 'Where 'bouts, Ray?' and he said, 'Out there on Cedar Creek,' and he said, 'Let's go out there sometime and look at it.' So one day we rode out to see it. I said, 'Ray, how much you got to have for this place?' It was 100 acres. Ray said, 'Hamp, I'll tell you what, I'll take $1,100 for it.' And I said, 'Ray, I ain't got no $1,100.' And he said, 'How much you got?', and I said, 'I got $800.' And he said, 'Hamp, I'll tell you what I'll do. You give me that $800 dollars, and I'll go on a note with you at the bank for the other $300.' So we went in the bank and Mr. Johnny Dugger went right along with it and I bought it. We moved out here in this same house in November of 1943," he said.

The following year, their second son, Leman, was born, and eventually a daughter, Glenda, and another son, Terrell.

"I had bought me a mule and six cows with the $75 I had earned while I worked on the CCC camp, and they'd been at my daddy's house, so I brought them out here to the farm and we got started farming.

"Me and my brother–in–law put us up a little still over there by his house in north Macclenny. I'd work every day and go back over to his place at night where he was staying with his mama on the Donald Crews place. I think he was still in school at the time. We didn't have but about five or six barrels, but we got us up a little stock and we didn't know who to sell it to until Wallace Dupree came along. His wife's uncle was living at Winter Haven so he took our moonshine down there and when he came back he gave me a stack of dollar bills this high. I think my part came to $300. I said, 'Now, what am I going to do

with this money, keep it, farm with it or what?' -- I paid my farm off with it.

"We kept on making it and selling it to Wallace and I made a little money. Then we put us up a little bit of beer down here in my pond," he said.



**Old cow truck used by Hamp Register to haul moonshine**

"One time, he and his brother-in-law had a little still somewhere up the creek, I never did know exactly where it was," said Nettle laughing. "But me and his wife and the kids would go down and fish off the bridge and keep a watch out for 'em. They had a little old rowboat and they'd take the sugar off the truck and put it on the little old boat and carry it down the stream to their still. They sweetened that river two or three times when the boat would turn over. They'd come out of there so disappointed because they had lost their sugar. I had Glenda down there in a basket one time. It was usually on a Sunday afternoon when they did such as that," said Lettie.

"Revenuers would come around all the time and we usually knew when they were out," she said. " We had our ways of letting the men know. We'd raise an old sheet or some kind of flag up on the house and when they'd see that they knew to be cautious. They could see it from the branch when they were down there working," she said.

The Registers handled their money cautiously and frugally, slowly investing in property as it became available around them.

"The first was our neighbor, Willis Crews, who wanted to sell his place. It had some timber on it," said Hamp. "So we bought it. The timber helped me pay for it. Then we just kept buying up land that joined up with ours. Seemed like when I'd get out of debt somebody else would want to sell. We ended up with 900 acres. Most of the

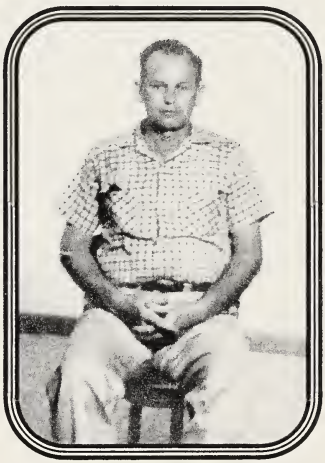
land had timber on it, and that helped me pay for it with what I was making on the side with moonshine. I knew I was no more than a little old sharecropper's boy, and I could never be like the Knabbs, but I could see what the Knabbs had done with land, and I said I would just go along with buying up land."

"We moved in here at an opportune time," said Lettie. "Most of the old-timers were having to sell out and go to town because they couldn't afford to live in the country anymore. Most of them all growed tobacco and had got too old to do that. Their children had moved to town to find work and didn't want the farms, so we've stayed here and struggled all these years. It's been a lot of hard work."

As time progressed, so did bigger ideas for the moonshine industry.

"We never did let our children mess with it," said Lettie. "I helped him, but they didn't."

In the early 1950's, state beverage agents began coming around more often and it was getting harder to hide moonshine stills, no matter how deep in the woods or far down the creeks.



**Hamp Register**

"We started doing business with Junior Crockett. He would buy all we could make," said Hamp. "The revenuers were tearing stills up a-going and a-coming, and we decided we'd put one underground. So Junior got someone to come in from Jacksonville with a drag line and dig the hole. We had bought the old Oscar Kelly place that had been turned into a turkey farm. It had a big two-story house there that was partly finished. We let, Herman Ruis, who had been turpentining with us, and his family move into the house so he could work at the still and look after things. It was a pretty good-sized hole they dug. We walled it up with lumber after that man dug the hole. We covered the top of it up with dirt and placed a chicken pen on top of the entrance. We had to move the old chicken coop to even go down in it. We had about thirty barrels down there. It had electricity and water, but that was all a bunch of bull that there was a television

and couch and chairs and such down there," he said, adding, "All that was exaggerated."

Hamp said he couldn't remember just how big the still was, but he thought it was about a 20x30. He couldn't remember the yield, because it varied, he said. And word leaked of the undertaking, even though those connected with it were expected to be loyal and not talk.



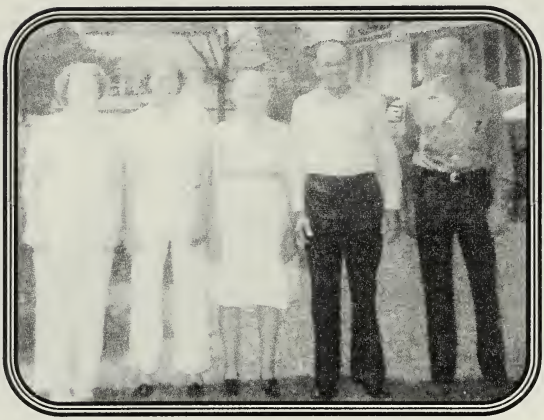
**Young Hamp Register while serving in the CCC camp**

And about a year after the elaborate underground operation was built, the revenuers made a house call.

"It was about dark and I'd gone over to see Herman Ruis, to take some bedding," began Hamp. "I was standing out in the yard with Herman when we saw a man walking up the road about a quarter way from the house. I got in my truck and started to leave and Herman said, 'Don't let that man come up here.' So I stopped to talk to him, and he got in the truck with me and asked me who lived there. I told him, and he said, 'Let's go back up there,' so we did. Then two more men came up there. I had to figure out a story, so I had rye seed in the truck and I told them I'd gone there to get Herman to help me plant it. I stuck to that story. Just then Junior drove up, looking for me, and Lewis Moore right behind him. So we were all arrested.

"We learned later that they had been watching us for a week. They were parking their car and walking through the woods where they found a safe place to watch from. Later we went back and found the stakeout where they had been watching the still from. We found their chewing gum wrappers, empty cigarette packs, and such. They took me and Junior to jail that night, in the same car, and put us in the same cell."

Meanwhile, one of the black men who helped at the still ran to the house and hid behind a TV. The federal agents knew they had



**Children of Bart and Daisy Harris Register (l to r): Pauline, Alma Lee, mother Daisy Harris Register, Hamp and Tom**

seen two black men there, so they searched for him throughout the house. They looked upstairs, under the beds and every where.

"He was hunkered down there behind the TV and they never found him. Later he told us he had to cough and was trying to stifle it. The people that lived there had a little boy and they told him to make all the noise he could to distract the agents while the man was behind the TV. He just sat there until we all left. One agent, he stayed behind to watch out for things and he was parked on one side of the house. So this black man, he picked up a little old puppy to keep it from barking and went to the other side of the house where he crawled out the back window. He carried that little old puppy all the way to the back field where he put him down and made his getaway. He never was called in, " explained Hamp.

"I think that may be where all that talk came from, us having a television inside the underground still, but the TV was in the house, not the still," said Hamp.

Contrary to what some people have speculated, Hamp said the revenuers did not follow Junior Crockett to the still the evening they were arrested.

"No, they'd been watching us for awhile," he said. "And the way things were changing, people had started reporting everybody and they had reported us. They knew it was inside a chicken pen. All the speculation about it being elaborate with a TV, furniture and such was just loose talk," he said.

"It was my still, and my still alone." said Hamp. "Junior Crockett was the middle man. He bought my whiskey and Glen Johnson hauled it for him. And there was no television, or furniture in it."



**Family of Lettie Crews Register (l to r): Lettie, Bertie McDavid, Rev. Artis Crews, Dicie Gonzalez, Zylphia Crews, Ozzie Legget, Burtha Griffis, Lydia Davis, Vera Eddy**

Lettie was home the evening the raid took place. She remembers the incident well. "I had started to go over to the still that night, but before I did, Glen came running up to the house and told me not to go," she said. "We went to Doris's house to tell her."

According to Glenn Johnson, he had been hauling moonshine for Junior Crockett for many years. On this particular night, he had driven a truck there to be loaded with the whiskey when two men stopped him, jumped in the truck, and identified themselves as federal agents, one being Phillip Tomberlin. He jumped to run, but they wrestled him to the ground. In the scuffle, he got away, and ran through the woods toward the Register home, where he found Lettie.

"Doris said Junior had always told her that if something went wrong, to stay out of it and he would take care of things, so I stayed there with her awhile and then went back home," said Lettie.

It took three trials over a period of ten years to acquit those arrested that evening, explained Hamp. "We had five lawyers. None of us was convicted," he said. "They blowed the still up with dynamite. I wasn't around. I was so upset I didn't want to think of that thing any more. We don't know when they did it, but they told us they did it."

"Eventually, we did go back over there and it was a great big old hole, everything had fell in," said Lettie. "Trees had all growed up in it. Everyone used it for a trash pit for a long time. There's no sign of it now."

Not only was the trial long and drawn out, but the Registers' had to raise the money to pay lawyers, not only for Hamp, but for those working for him who were arrested at the still.

"That's just a gentlemen's agreement among those who owned moonshine stills, or those who hired others to work for them," said Hamp. "We were responsible if anything happened to them."

"We didn't have any cash," said Lettie. "We had tied all our assets up in land, so we had to cut some timber to raise the money, since the lawyers insisted on cash. We had quit the moonshining, so we had an old truck with sides to it. It was really a cow truck and Hamp had been arrested driving it once with a load of sugar. So we removed the sides and began to cut that timber and haul it to the sawmill. I drove the tractor and helped Hamp. We sold the timber to the pulpwood people and Hamp hauled logs to the sawmill in Macclenny. Me and him done the logging. As we got paid for the timber, we were so scared to keep the cash money around, so we did put it in jars and buried it in the chicken house. But honestly, that is the only time we ever had any cash money around," she said.

State and Federal agents for years had sought to corner Junior Crockett, the man they pegged as the 'Shine King' or 'Kingpin' in Baker County moonshine operations. Headlines blared of the arrest in the Florida Times Union on Thursday, January 29, 1953.

The article described the still as being "elaborate" and located about seven miles northwest of Macclenny. It reported that the still operation consisted of a 600–gallon capacity distilling pot and 70 barrel fermenters, containing 3,500 gallons of mash. The agents reported seizing approximately 1,000 gallons of moonshine liquor in one–gallon cans, wrapped in onion sacks.

The still was said to be in an underground hole, about 40 feet by 40 feet, with shoring to hold up the ceiling and about two feet of earth above the ceiling. The article said that on the surface, the site appeared to be a chicken yard with out–buildings covering the vents. Below the ground, bottled gas had been used to heat the pot and the mash was fermented from the fermenter to the pot by an electric pump. The place was outfitted with electric lights.

One Cadillac and two trucks were seized as well as the land and the still, the article reported.

Temporary bond was $500 each for Crockett, Register, Herman Ruis, Lewis Moore, and Albert Mitchell.

M.H. Myerson was reported to be the attorney representing the defendants.


Sunday

Canada sues U.S. for refusal to re

Troubles in the land of tobacco

U.S. leaf losing ground in markets

**July 10, 1983 - Farmer Hamp Register makes a new kind of headline. With moonshine troubles past, he now faces difficulty with tobacco crops.**

The Registers turned to farming, exclusively, and extended their efforts in the dairy, timber, cattle and tobacco enterprises. They did well through hard work and long hours. They determined to educate their children and shield them from the poverty they had known and the moonshine industry that helped them escape from it.

"It took the moonshine to help me get my feet on the ground, but that don't mean I didn't work for it," said Hamp. "All my children have got homes out here on this place and the grandchildren are coming back all the time. I told my mama she wouldn't have to go to a nursing home as long as I can help it, so she stays here on the property with us, making five generations.

"I don't tell Lettie too much, but I wouldn't trade her for nothing; in fact I wouldn't change a thing about my life except that I might take off a little more time. But as long as I can go out there and mess with my old cows and can get someone to help me work, I'm better off. In the summer time I have a little trouble getting my tobacco together, but the tobacco crops have been good to me. It just seems like I get along better when I'm doing something and I thank the Lord for giving me good health to get along good."

Lettie is proud of the fact that she was eventually able to return to school. She received her high school diploma the same year her oldest child, Sonny, graduated from high school.

Hamp Register's eyes light up when he describes the joy he finds in attending the Christian Fellowship Temple in Macclenny, where the Rev. Leslie Thomas is pastor and music is part of the ministry.

"We have three fiddle players there all the time," said Hamp, with a big smile. "There's Chubby Wise, Albert Eddy and Robert Combs," he said.

From the patter of their children's feet upon the land to the pitter-patter of grandchildren running up and down Hamp Register Road, to the squeals and delight of their great-grandchildren running in and out, it all pleases the Registers.

"We've give all the youngun's 120 acres apiece," he said, in his slow Southern drawl. "Having our children around us is a wonderful thing, you just love them and them little grandchildren so much. But there are drawbacks to it, too. They have always lived here on the place and if there is any troubles in the families, you know about it, but we try and look out for each other, and I wouldn't want it any other way."



**Family of Hampa nd Lettie Register**
**Seated: Hamp and Lettie**
**Standing: Glenda, Terrell, Sonny and PeeWee**

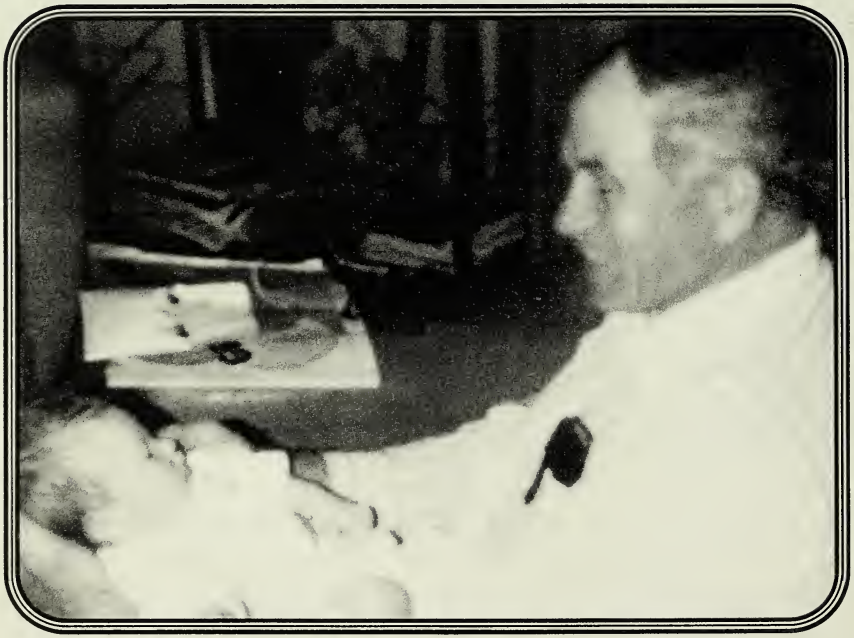
Last year, the Register's second son, 50-year-old Leamon (PeeWee) died. "He had always lived right here on the land with us, and it's hard," said Hamp. "I try to stay busy and that helps, but I'm afraid even staying busy won't help his mother. Lettie and I will never get over losing him," he said.

Lloyd A. Register, Jr. -- 'Sonny', as he is called -- is married to Peggy Prevatt and they have three children, Douglas, Darrell, and Debra. PeeWee was married to Ruth Johns and their two children are Ruthia and Clinton Bart. Glenda, and her former husband, John Walker, have

two children, Sarah and Clayton. Terrell and his former wife, Brenda Higginbotham, have three children, Scott, Jim Bob and Marci.

"Darrell and his wife, Denette, gave us our first great-grandchildren, Crystal and Garrett. Then Doug and Penny gave us Joel. Debra and Bryan Lowry gave us Curtis and Cason. We are so proud of our five great-grandchildren," said Lettie.

The Registers are friendly, jovial people who are rich in friends and family as well as the surrounding fertile land. The life they live is simple, just like the home they moved into more than half a century ago, which has only undergone remodeling a couple of times. But no amount of remodeling will ever change the open-door hospitality which still beckons as you pass by the simple frame home by the side of the road where a part of Baker County's history is buried, except for the memories.



**Hamp Register spends happy hours with granddaughter, Sarah, daughter of Glenda (Register) and John Walker**

# Edward Clifton 'Catfish' Stokes

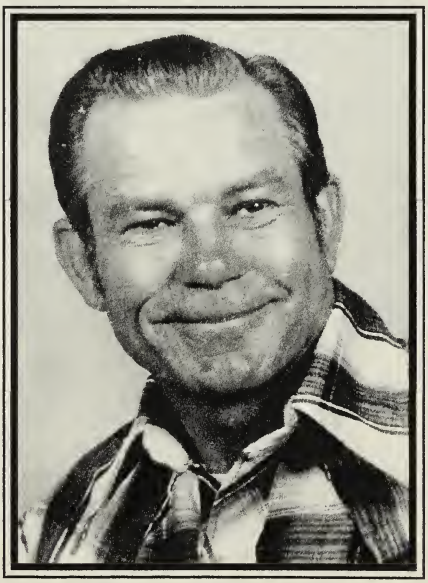
## Sanderson–Macclenny

*"I'll tell you, when I see that whiskey running out of that condenser, well.....that's the prettiest sight I've ever saw in my life. It's just something you can't explain."*

*"I been in 16 cars that turned over and never had a broken bone. Now, that story would be good for anybody that don't believe in prayer. All the time I was drinking and doing all that kind of stuff, my Mama and my sister was home praying for me, and that's the reason I'm alive today."*

Edward C. Stokes

At one time, Edward 'Catfish' Stokes manufactured more whiskey stills than anyone in Baker County and more than likely, anyone in the north Florida and south Georgia areas. His ingenious inventions served the moonshiners so well that they were almost limitless in their production of the illicit white lightning moonshine operations that spiralled to great heights during the '50 and '60 decades.



**Edward Clifton "Catfish" Stokes**

Catfish, as he was tagged early in his life by classmate Jeanette Harvey, was born west of Sanderson in the 'reforest' section to a poor, farm–working couple named Obie and Mae Stokes. Mae was the daughter of Charlie and Easter Combs of Sanderson. Obie's

father died when he was young, but Catfish remembers his grandmother, Annie Stokes. The Stokes couple had two other children, Loretha and Owen.

"We moved around quite a lot when I was growing up," said the quiet-spoken man who now spends much of his time mulling over the sensational past that gave Baker County its most renowned status of the century.

"Most of the people I knew back then are all dead now," he says, surprise rising in his voice. "They didn't last too long."

The Stokes family moved to Bradenton when their son was young, and returned to Baker County when he was about six. He attended school in Sanderson where his family farmed 'some' and occasionally drove the mule and wagon into Sanderson.

"It took all day just to drive there and back," he said.

Eventually they settled in north Macclenny on Ivy Street and sharecropped a 40- acre farm that belonged to Luther Williams.

"My parents worked from before sun-up to after dark," he said.

At one time he worked on a dairy farm located at Ivy Street and Highway 121 for the late Duncan Rhoden. "I had to get up at 4 a.m., work on the farm, come in, grab a mouthful to eat, rush to get to school, and when I would come in from school, I'd run get me a biscuit and a piece of meat or something and go back to working. I worked most of my life and didn't make any money, at least not enough of it to count," he said.

Two days after Christmas, when he was in the 7th grade and about 15 years old, he quit school.

"Mr. Rhoden paid me $3.50 a week. I delivered all the milk that was delivered to the stores and houses in Macclenny, and was still trying to go to school," he said.

At one time he worked on a farm out from Glen St. Mary for his uncle.

"He paid me $15 a month with room and board. That was about enough to buy my tobacco. I was smoking then. Mama talked me into coming back and I stayed at home until I was drafted. I declare, I believe they must have had my draft papers already filled out when I turned 18, 'cause they were there shortly after," he laughed.

Eight weeks after his induction, he was sailing the Pacific Ocean on an oil tanker.

"We were like a filling station for the ships. I saw a lot of the ships get hit, mostly by suicide planes. I saw one ammunition ship get hit. No one survived because it was just one big ball of fire," he said.

Twenty months later he was headed back home to Baker County. Little did he know that what he had learned in the Navy would thrust him into a business that would determine his career -- at least for the next two decades.

"When I came home, I was supposed to be given about $20 a month by the Navy, but the red tape got so bogged down that I got disgusted and left the office before I filled out the papers for it. I just said, 'I don't need it, I'll find another way,' and so I went home.

"Before I left for the Navy, I'd done a little bit of bootlegging. Back in them days it was not a big operation. There was several of the guys around that were still in it after I came out of the service in 1946



**Former Florida Highway Patrol Trooper, Vince Smallwood, with Edward "Catfish" Stokes looking over parts of a now defunct Copper Moonshine Still**

and I got more into it. I really don't remember just when or how I got started," he said, trying to recall.

"That was a long time ago," he smiled.

"I remember that in the beginning whiskey was made mostly with two-barrel stills. There wasn't much money in it. They'd work the mash off in 50-gallon barrels. I do remember when it started moving over into Baker County because at first most of the moonshining was done over in Georgia.

"Back then, they fired a still with lightered knots and you could ride all those dirt roads over there in Georgia and see the location of the stills by the black smoke coming up through the pine trees. The revenuers didn't hardly ever mess with them. That's when they made scratch-fed whiskey back in the '30s and '40s. When the government started treating scratch feed for bugs, that messed up the scratch feed and you couldn't make whiskey out of it. People lost a lot of money before they found out what the problem was. They had to start buying scratch feed that wasn't treated.

"When I first got started, I used a hand pump to pump water. In fact most all of us did it that way. What little bit we made was made out in the woods. We'd drive the pipe down about 10 feet or so in the ground, and we could tell when we'd hit water. It was hard work. We'd have to stand there and pump water continuously. Later we used gasoline pumps.

"When they started making what they called Groundhog whiskey, the quantities got larger; it went from two barrels, to four barrels and then six barrels. It finally got on up to where they'd have seven or eight 40-barrel stills in one place. Now that's a bunch of alcohol. I've built seven in one place twice in my life and I got caught at one of 'em. I was just finishing up the last one when the law come in there. They didn't charge me with making whiskey, they just charged me with making the still. I think they charged me a $300 fine."

At first, Catfish said, the primitive moonshine stills were copper and round and small in size. The groundhog stills were square and constructed from steel. A 40-barrel still was six feet wide, three feet high and 10 feet long.

"In winter time you could put twenty 100–pound sacks of sugar in it, three sacks of wheat brand and 15 pounds of yeast and that would work off in three or four days. If it was doing good, you'd make about 57 five–gallon jugs of whiskey from it," he said.

It's obvious that the local moonshiners, and those in south Georgia, owed much of their prosperity to Catfish.

"I built the first gas burners ever used around here," he said. "When I got it built I took it to a friend's still and it worked real good for him. It was so clean and just about everybody went to it at one time. It just took over. I had a right smart of work going on. Then I built the shot–gun type condenser. It replaced the copper condenser. It was seven feet long and had 50 tubes in it. You had your water going in on the outside of the tubes and you'd have 50 little old streams of alcohol running out. Everybody went to that right away. It's the most interesting thing that I ever got into," he said, with obvious excitement as he recalled those days.

Just how did Catfish get into it? Well, it started when he cashed in on the experience he gained while serving in the Navy, he said.

"I got the idea while I was on the ship. We had condensers because we had to make fresh water from salt water, and it was the condenser that condensed the steam into water that I got the idea.

"After I got out of the service I bought a little piece of land next to my Mama and Daddy for one hundred dollars. Then when a restaurant burned downtown I bought it, moved it to my property and repaired it myself. It didn't cost much money. Then I went and bought me a welding machine. I didn't know anymore about welding than you do. I didn't know how to buy rods. I thought you just went and told 'em you wanted welding rods. I got some information from the place where I bought the machine from, and also from the people where I bought the rods. I knew how to turn the machine on, and that's all. Marvin Prevatt, a friend, had learned to weld, I think in the shipyard, and I got him to come and help me a little bit, and he did maybe 30–40 minutes. I started making the stills right there on Ivy Street. It pretty well wasn't against the law to do that then. Nobody ever said anything for many years, but all that eventually changed. I

even built stills right on Highway 90. I rented a place from Ray Phillips and built stills there for a long time until I sold out to Lonzie Altman. He soon quit because he wasn't making no money, so I started up again then.

"One day the revenuers pulled up there and they started talking to me. I don't remember how the conversation went, but anyway they said, 'If you don't quit this, you are going to jail.' And I said, 'Well, give me to the morning and I'll be locked up.' And I did. I hauled everything off the property and put a lock on the door. Then I went and got me a truck and started going to the woods and building them. I did that for a long time. Sometimes I'd build them at the site of the still, but usually I would construct them in the woods. One day someone took me to their still and it happened that the Federal men were watching the still. They took a picture of me building it. That night, someone came to warn me that they had a warrant for me, so I took my truck and welding machine over to Georgia and hid it. I got charged a fine of $500 that time and that's when I just finally quit. I'd already been caught several times and I knew if the Federal ever got me I'd have to serve time. Joe Newmans helped me get on with the Pipe Fitters Union. I was 40 years old."

Catfish says he has forgotten many details of his moonshine days involvement.

"It's been a long time. If I tell something that is wrong it won't be my intention," he said.

"Bootlegging was always hard work," he said. "I hauled some, made some, but I mostly built the stills," he said.

"After those revenuers stopped by my business that day, and I bought the truck, a lot of the stills I made were partly constructed at the house and partly in the woods. It took me about two hours to put one together. I'd spend about an hour at the house and after I got in the woods, another hour. I built a compartment in the truck beneath the floor bed, where I could store four of the steel sheets. If I got stopped they wouldn't think to look there for it. At first we didn't need to do things like that, but then times got tougher. If I was going very far, like up in Georgia, I usually tried to build four stills at a time. I charged $125 each.

"At first I didn't make too much money because I wasn't much of a welder and didn't do too good of a job, and was slow, but I got better. In fact, one of those revenuers who had been in on taking pictures of me working at the still told me that if I ever needed a recommendation for welding, then come get him. He said he'd be glad to recommend me. One year, I kept up with how many I made, and I built 175. That's just the stills, not counting the condensers and burners and stuff.

"I did a lot of the work on a credit, and most everyone paid me, just a few never did. I'll tell you, most of the bootleggers were more honest than the people you'd find out there on the street. Most did just exactly what they said they'd do. I even built some of those stills in people's houses, in their barns, and one in sight of the prison in Reidsville, Ga. In fact, it was in the woods on the prison property, and you could see the prison from where it was.

"I'll tell you, when I see that whiskey running out of that condenser, well, that's the prettiest sight I've ever saw in my life. I mean, it's just something you can't explain. You know, homemade whiskey is more pure and good than bonded whiskey. The majority of the people made good whiskey. You could tell if it was good shine by testing it. The way we did that was to shake it and see if there were any beads on it. There were some people that were real good at that. They could tell you what proof it was and you could stick a tester in there and it would be awful close to it. I could do it pretty good.

"Alcohol, when it first comes out, will have big bubbles and they'll flash right off. When it gets down to let's say 100–proof, the beads will be smaller and they'll be in clusters, and they will stay there a little bit. The size of the bead pretty well tells you what proof it is. I experimented with it a lot. Some of us just bought a few testers at the last to see how good we were. Good shine is 100–105 proof and it don't give you a hangover like bonded whiskey.

"I guess you could call me an alcoholic at one time because I drank a lot, but I haven't drank in about 15 years now. I drank a lot of shine and I drank a lot from the bar, too. Sometimes I'd go to the bar after dinner and stay there until after midnight when I wasn't working. I have never been too healthy and it made me feel good, and that's one of the big reasons I drank it. I could drink a fifth of whiskey in a day."

At one time Catfish and some friends had a still that was down state. It was unique.

"I was continuously thinking about something that nobody else had ever done," he said. "So we got this old power wagon and we pulled the body off of it and left the cab on . We installed a 500-gallon tank on it and it looked just like one of them old water-tank trucks. We drove it everywhere and nobody suspected it held moonshine."

The group lived in a rented house in an orange grove. "If anyone came around, they would have just thought it was a watering truck for the grove trees. What we did, we buried five of those big tanks just like the one we had on the truck. We ploughed the rows over them just like we were getting ready to plant a garden. Actually that was where the beer was working off down in the tanks. It worked out okay except that it would work up a heat and get too hot and not make as much liquor as it ought to. When it was ready we'd pump one of those buried tanks out into the truck's tank, turn on the burner and make the shine," he said, smiling.

Catfish said bootlegging was not good for a marriage. "I've proved that," he said with a wry smile. "I been married to four women seven times. I can tell you first hand that it does cause a lot of trouble. You are out at night and the work is not consistent. It's just not good for a marriage," he lamented.

He was 22 when he married the first time. He and his wife raised two children before divorcing.

In his lifetime and experience, he watched the industry grow from a small one- farmer dealer to big-time operations. He remembers when Ed Yarbrough was elected sheriff and had campaigned to 'clean up the moonshine in Baker County.'

"The best I've ever known of anyone doing in the shine business is when five days before Ed Yarbrough took over as sheriff, these two guys set them up two 40s. They were on a good clean spring branch, the water was cold, the weather was cold. Everything was ideal. They used forty 100-pound sacks of sugar, six bags of wheat brand, and thirty pounds of yeast, and it took about three days to work it off. Then they sweetened it back up with the same

amount and another three days to run it again. They made 1,185 gallons of whiskey in those two runs and about $1,300. That's the best I've ever knowed of. They made a little over a gallon a minute, and that was a good turn out. After Ed took office they closed down and sold their outfit to somebody that moved it to Columbia County."

Catfish said he didn't slow down his operations even when the newly elected sheriff, Ed Yarbrough, took office.

"I continued to make them after Ed took office. That didn't slow me up a bit because I didn't do it here in this county at that time. Most all my business then was up in Georgia," he said.

"I been in 16 cars that turned over and never had a broken bone," he said. "Now that story would be good for anybody that don't believe in prayer. All the time I was drinking and doing all that kind of stuff, my Mama and my sister was home praying for me. And that's the reason I'm alive today," he said.

Catfish eventually bought 13 acres on the Big St. Mary's River and settled down more than three decades ago. He sold his brother, Owen, seven acres and Owen built a home next door. Sometimes, the two talk about the past.

"Owen got shot at a still when he was young and that wound him up," said Catfish. "He quit. He was at a still in Pin Hook Swamp when Slim Horton, a deputy sheriff in Columbia County, shot him in the foot, but he didn't catch him. Owen ran in the swamp and got away. The boys who were working with him found him about midnight. He had been lost and crawling around in that swamp all night. He didn't even know he was shot for a long time. It broke all three of those center bones in his foot."

After that, Owen worked as a mechanic, then for North East Florida State Hospital.

Does he have any regrets?

"Well, you look back and you have all kind of feelings about it," he said. "Some are good and some are not so good.

"I never got mad when the Federal men arrested me or when they tore my stills up. They were just doing their job, and I was doing mine. There was no need to get mad," he said.

From his porch he can look out at the beautiful and serene river flowing by, gently rippling small waves upon a sandy shoreline. At the age of 69, he still trims trees and shrubs and has a vegetable garden. Looking toward a big oak tree, the path to it obscured by underbrush, he remembers the small still operation he once ran just to have 'drinking liquor.' He remembers the day a scouting plane flew over and spotted it from the air.

"My wife, at the time, was watching television and she heard their radio coming through on the television. She called me and told me what she had heard, so I just picked up the phone and called a local deputy and told him someone had set up a moonshine still on my property and I'd like for him to come out and destroy it. So he did."

Sometimes, his old buddies, the few that are left, stop by, and they talk about 'those days.' Sometimes he finds pleasure in the solitude of sitting quietly by the shore of the river watching the mesmerizing water flow by.

Today, he does not drink liquor, nor does he smoke. For more than a decade he has been a regular attendant of the Church of God in Glen St. Mary. He has never been baptized, although he agrees it might not be a bad idea to do so.

"I'm just waiting for the rapture," he says with conviction. "And I think it will come in the next five years. I'm not planning on dying," he smiles with confidence. "I'm just planning to be caught up in it!"

# A Moonshine Incident

## With Odis Yarbrough

*"I had me a ringside seat as they chopped it up with axes."*

**Odis Yarbrough**

The earliest arrest by federal revenuers in Baker County may have been in 1922. As Odis Yarbrough tells the story, he and Lee Burnsed were hauling stove wood for John Burnsed with two mules and a wagon about mid-day when they heard gun fire down by the creek.

"I knew something was up," said Odis. "I told Lee the revenuers had got the still.

"We knew it was there, but we didn't have anything to do with it," he said, "but try and tell that to them revenuers. We were just sittin' there in the wagon when them revenuers came out of the gallberry bushes. They'd been sittin' there watching for someone to come up to the still. They told us to drive on up to the still and they kept us there until they tore it up. It was a big one, too, running 300 gallons a day. I had me a ringside seat as they chopped it up with axes. They'd already caught some of 'em working there and I think they charged 'em a $50 fine," he said. "We just told 'em we didn't have nothing to do with the sti!l. Lee had some of their dinners in the wagon. If they had told us they were going to take me to jail I could have out-run everyone of 'em because back then I could run as fast as a deer," said the 93-year-old Yarbrough family patriarch as he gave a first-hand account of the incident.


MOONSHIN ELLY
NET WT. 5 OZ.

# Reverend Wilford Lyons

## Macclenny/Georgia Bend

*"When you are running about 115–120 mph and your headlights see something in the road, you can't stop. I went down a 20–foot embankment. They beat me over my head with their black jacks, and it took about 100 stitches and several pints of blood."*

Wilford Lyons



**Reverend Wilford Lyons**

When Wilford Lyons was born to a poor, but hard–working farm couple in the Georgia Bend April 8, 1925, it was during The Great Depression, and times were hard. There was little or no money, and like most people in the area, families were surviving on what they could scrounge from the poor soil to grow their vegetables, or glean from the woodlands and fishing streams. Down by the creek, his father, John Wesley Lyons, set up a little one–barrel copper still to brew a little moonshine that often brought in a few dollars for necessities. He would parch red oak and age some of his shine in four wooden barrels because it brought more money.

With a family of six growing sons and one daughter, Wesley took a job with a sash and door place in Jacksonville, making $15 a week, while his sons stayed home to work the 40–acre farm and tend the still. Their father rented a room for a dollar during the week and found he could survive by eating baloney for 15 cents a day. He came home to the family on weekends, driving on crude, unpaved roads because, at the time, only one paved road existed in the county and

that was highway 90. On his return trip into town each Monday morning about 4 a.m., he would stop in Hart Haven, where two brothers ran a convenience store. Then he would lift up the back seat of his 1936 Chevrolet where there was just room for four five–gallon jugs of 'shine' to be stored, and sell it to the brothers.

"Daddy had been stopped several times by the law because they knew he had been making it, and they'd search all over his car, but they never found it," said Wilford. "What little bit of money he made working in Jacksonville and selling the small amount of shine barely covered our necessities," he said.

"Almost every family in the Georgia Bend had a small still to pick up a few dollars back in them days, but it was a small operation," he explained. "There was actually so little shine made by individual farmers, like daddy, that if someone came to buy a load they'd have to buy from four or five families to benefit someone to drive over to pick it up and haul it out. My grandpa, Jode Thrift, didn't deal in it except to age it. He had a little place down by the creek where he'd keep it for years. He would mark the date on it when he put it there and he had doctors and lawyers and all kinds of people coming on weekends to get them a gallon of his aged moonshine because he had the reputation of having the best moonshine around. It was made clean and as far as alcohol was concerned, most people liked it better than that you could buy in the store and bars.

"Grandpa always said we weren't really breaking the law, we just weren't paying taxes on it. He thought a fellow ought to have the right to make a little money like that, just the same as some people do today who think they ought to have the right to make a little homemade wine."

One day, luck ran out and the still was raided by Federal agents and John Wesley Lyons was sent to prison. The strain was too much for his wife, Pearlie Mae. When she suffered a nervous breakdown, her children were scattered around with relatives while she was sent to a hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia, to recover.

"That made a big change in my daddy," remembered Wilford. "While he was gone to prison, we boys ran the farm. I had to drop out of school. Uncle Lonnie Thrift had a truck and we cut timber

with a cross cut saw and cut pines on our own property and Uncle Lonnie hauled them to the saw mill for us. We sold the timber to help mama have some money while daddy was gone. All our neighbors helped and Grandma Thrift always had some food for us to eat."

When the family re–united, they moved to Macclenny. Wesley Lyons gained employment in Jacksonville again, and this time took his son with him.

"I must have been about 14," said Wilford. "I stayed with the same couple dad stayed with. I made eight dollars a week, and like dad, gave them a dollar for my room. That's where I learned to drink goats milk," he said.

And that's not all he learned. He discovered he was quick to absorb all he was taught. His employer at Jones Furniture Company considered him so intelligent and trustworthy that he encouraged him to remain in his employment, promising to train him to someday take over his business. Wilford declined because he turned 17 and his mama signed for him to join the Navy.

"At that time, I didn't have a record, so I didn't have any problem being accepted by the Navy," recalled Wilford. "I'd been picked up a time or two by this man named Spinks, a federal agent, but me being a youngun' they never made a case against me."

Almost immediately, Wilford began to learn new skills. The Navy provided a training ground in the aviation field and soon he was off to southern England where a cold WW II raged. More than one third of his 180–member crew was lost. Once again he was noticed by his superiors for his intelligence and unusual ability to excel. He was strongly encouraged to make the Navy his career but after 42 months of service he came home to Baker County.

By this time his dad had a cabinet shop in downtown Macclenny and while Wilford was there one day, he looked out to see a special girl walk by with a friend. "I said, 'I believe she is going to be the one.'

She was Eveline Davis, daughter of Dan Davis. Soon after, while attending a square dance, 'around in the old log cabin where they danced until one or two in the morning,' he caught himself by surprise when he boldly walked up to her and her date and asked her out. He was even more surprised when she accepted.

"On August 9, 1947, we went over and got Farley Burnsed out of bed and with his overalls on, he married us," said Wilford.

"While I was away serving in the war, one of my brothers had done real well making and selling moonshine because it was really in demand during that time. The economy was better and the price of the whiskey was up, so even though I had all these other opportunities to do things, I knew enough about moonshine that I knew how it worked and how to make it, so I went back into it," he said.

"I got to talking with men like Wallace Dupree and they offered to back me if I went into it. If I made it, they would buy it from me," he said. "I think they were among the first that started hauling it out of Baker County, but later on, me and my brothers started hauling it too. My younger brother Jimmy was our number one driver. A lot of times I drove, too. I had an Oldsmobile that Dub Sands fixed up and I could out-run the law. Back then, there were no radios in their cars and we never did get run down and caught.

For the next few years, Wilford Lyons lived on the edge of the law and fate. This was made evident late one night when he was following his brother, Jimmy, who was driving with a car loaded with whiskey. As the cars sped down the Georgia highway at rates of speeds exceeding 100 miles per hour, their car lights suddenly beamed on a set of police cars at the end of a narrow, one-way bridge.

"When you are running about 115-120 mph and your headlights see something in the road, you can't stop. I was right on Jimmy's bumper. He hit the cars first. Then my car hit Jimmy's car and knocked him on down the road far enough that he was able to get out of his car and run. I went down a 20-foot embankment, but I didn't have a scratch on me. "Almost immediately, there was the sheriff and two deputies and two Georgia State patrolmen pulling me out of the car. They beat me over my head with their black jacks, and said it was for running over their cars. I kept trying to tell them I couldn't help it. What they really wanted was money. They carried me to a doctor who sewed my head up. It took about 100 stitches, and the doctor told them to take me on over to Douglas because I had lost a lot of blood and needed to be in the hospital. Well, they gave me several

pints of blood. In a few days I was transferred to the jail. My brother came up there and the law claimed I had received my injuries in the accident. When Willie came to see, I told him what happened. He was kinda quick tempered and was wanting to whip 'em right then. He told them, 'It's alright to run him, and it's alright to catch him, but it's not alright to beat him.'

"We were finally put into an office where there was a judge and what it all came down to was money. He wanted us to pay a $3,000 fine and they'd give us the car, a '51 Chrysler. So we paid it and left. Dub Sands went after the car and couldn't find one bit of blood inside. I kept my bloody clothes as evidence and went to the FBI in Jacksonville and told them what happened to me. I believe the two deputies would have beaten me to death had the sheriff not come up there. The FBI went up to investigate whether my civil rights had been violated, and they had. I went to a lawyer and he said, 'Well, you can't sue the state, and the only one you can sue is the sheriff and he don't have anything,' so I dropped it. But you know, in the next five to six years, every one of those men died violent deaths. Several years later, I saw the game warden that was there the night I was beat and he told me about them.

"Well, I recovered from that and you would have thought that would have been enough to have stopped anybody, but my brothers helped me to take care of everything and I went right back into the moonshine business again. I made it and hauled it.

"I had another real close call. We had bought a farm and moved up to Live Oak to get away from here for awhile. We made arrangements to pay off the sheriff and the deputies for protection in that area. I was selling to a state senator from there. He liked good moonshine to give to his friends.

"On this night, his brother was with me and we were going out to the farm to get some whiskey when a car pulled out in front of us. I told him, 'Oh, no, there ain't supposed to be nobody around here. I told him to hold on because I wasn't going to stop. I hit the front fender of the car, going so fast that I went in the ditch, but i came right on out. We turned down a woods road, got out and ran. Before daylight we came up to some people's house that he knew, so we got away.

They got my car, a 1951 Oldsmobile. I had already taken it out of my name when I started using it to haul whiskey. I didn't have insurance because there were no laws like that back then. Well, the law traced the car back to me anyway and they picked me up. I hired M. H. Myerson, a lawyer out of Jacksonville, and he said, 'Give me $500 and I'll get you out of this.' I had two friends from Baker County who said they would swear I was at their New Year's party because that happened on New Year's night. So they were my witnesses. Back then if you were a buddy, or a good friend, that's what you would do. Of course, it helped having the registration changed. The jury deliberated 10 minutes and found me 'Not Guilty.'"

Wilford admits there were many more times and many more close calls, but one particularly he remembers that changed him forever. "Actually, I was just riding in the car on this particular night. Jimmy was hauling and my partner was driving the car I was in. He and Jimmy had been talking to a man in Georgia about some moonshine, and the man turned out to be an undercover agent. We were arrested. Actually, Junior Crockett came to our rescue and paid our bail. He really put himself in a bad position to do it, but he was our only way of getting out of jail. That's just the way Junior was, he wouldn't let you down, even though he was putting himself in a bad position, making it look more and more that he was guilty of what he was accused of. They let him go on our bond and we were free to go. But when the trial came the judge gave me 18 months, Jimmy 18 months and my partner three years.

"I was really upset. What upset me the most was, I was leaving Eveline and my two children without any support. Eveline was working, but it was still hard on me knowing she had all the responsibility.

"They sent me to Valdosta first, then to Atlanta, which is a maximum security prison. While I was in there, Frank Costello was in there. At the time he was head of the whole mafia. And he was regarded as Mr. Costello in that prison. He had his own private guard around him. I was only one cell over at one time. While there, I was tempted very bad. Costello's bookkeeper was there and one day he said to me, 'Lyons, you're from Florida?', and I said, 'Yes,' and he said,

'You know, you are in the wrong business. Everybody's into moonshine, but I can put you onto something when you get out of here that will make you a couple million dollars.' I said, 'What's that?' and he said, 'Marijuana,' and I said, 'Marijuana, what's that?', and he explained it to me. Back then there wasn't no marijuana around Baker County, but he explained that it grew wild in the woods and he said more, but I told him I wasn't interested. That was in 1959 and a few years later it popped up everywhere around here.

"The warden called me into his office one day and questioned why I was in a maximum security prison on a first conviction on moonshine. He said it would take about 90 days but he was going to transfer me to a minimum security prison. And that's what happened. I was sent to Tallahassee. While there, I worked in the canvas shop where I made 25 cents an hour. I learned to make duffle bags for the service and hammocks for the navy. When I left prison, I had about $200 that I had saved. Eveline and her dad came for me, and they wouldn't let me go until midnight. I told Eveline on the way home, I'd learned my lesson and she'd never have to worry about me messing with moonshine again.

"I began to look for work. I got on at the Cool–Aire Corporation in Jacksonville starting out at $1.35 an hour. My work was so praiseworthy there that I got a raise every month. In the latter part of 1961, I went to work for Florida Fruit Company, where once again I began to excel in advancements. Since I had no more than an elementary education, I felt very grateful. All my life I have been an avid reader and while in the Navy I took advantage of every training program they offered.

Eveline and I had bought a little house across the street from the Church of God and she had been attending a revival there. Me and that boy of mine went off to the races on Friday night while she went there. I stopped by and bought me a half–pint of whiskey, but I didn't open it. When I got home that night, Eveline had been crying, and I asked her what was wrong. She said I'd just have to go over there to the revival to know, and she couldn't stop crying.

On Saturday, when I came home from work, she was still crying. She asked me if I was going to church with her that night and I

said, 'No, I'm too tired.' So she kept on crying and went on alone. She cried that night, but on Sunday her tears had kinda dried up, but I could tell she had been crying two or three days. So that night, she said, 'Please, please, go to church with me tonight,' and I said, 'alright, alright, alright! I've heard all this crying I can stand, and if it will shut you up I'll go to church.' She said, 'It will.'

"So we walked across the street to the church and when we walked in everyone grabbed us by the hand and said they were glad to see us. Just as I walked through the door I heard a voice and I looked around to see who was talking to me. That voice said, 'The same man that walked through that door tonight won't leave here,' and I just shook it off and walked on down the isle. Mama was with us, so we went about half-way down before we set down. The choir singing was good, and then the preacher got up to preach. He talked about how he'd had a two-week revival and nobody had got saved. Then he preached on dying and going to hell. A lot more preachers preached on it back then than they do now. Then he kept saying, 'There's a man here tonight,' pointing his finger out and it looked just like he was pointing at me, but I looked around and thought there must be 100 men tonight, he couldn't be talking to me, and he said, 'I feel like in my spirit if that man don't make it right tonight it may be the last chance he may get,' and when he kept on saying that tears began to run down my cheeks, and I looked over at Eveline. She was crying, too. I felt like my feet was tied, bound, and I looked at her and said, 'It's time to go,' and when I said that it was like my feet were released and I took her by the hand and got up heading down to the front of that church. About 30 or 40 minutes later, when I got through begging God to forgive me for all I'd done, I said, 'Lord, I've got a lot to be forgiven for, and I do feel it may have been my last chance.' That whole church had been praying for us for 12 years, and they just came alive that night. I got up from there so happy, and when I left home that night I'd left my cigar right by my table. I kept a cigar in my mouth all the time, I was never without one. So I said, 'Well, I'll be back for you later,' but when God saved me that night He took away all desire for cigars. And I mean to tell you, I loved them cigars like a pig does slop.

"I was 43 years old when that happened. Immediately after that, I couldn't wait to get to church. If the pastor didn't ask somebody to testify, I'd jump up and say, 'I want to testify. I want to tell you..... ' and I'd just go on and on praising God and what he'd done for me. Eveline used to say I sounded like I was preaching. We'd visit other churches and I'd stand up and tell them what a rotten, low-down scoundrel I was and finally Eveline asked me when I planned to answer God's call for me to preach. At times when I'd been in church and would testify, people would go to the altar and get saved. So I began to think about it."

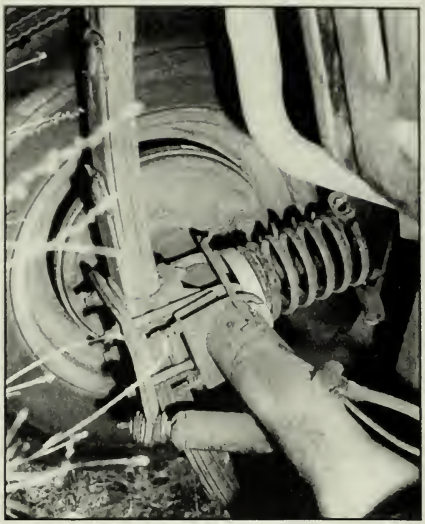
The rest is history. Once again, Wilford Lyons had been shown that anything he did was above average, and when it becomes above average with the Lord, miracles abound. His career as a minister is another book in itself, but through his ability, his talents and spiritual gifts, he spearheaded the building of the first Church of God in Glen St. Mary. Through his devotion and dedication, many people were brought to the altar of God who made commitments to serve Him.

Today, he has retired. He and Eveline have been to the Holy Land 11 times. He has walked and talked with God for more than three decades.

Looking back, he uses his experiences to help others, to lift them up from their troubled lives and bring them into a sphere where they can deal with life, walking down another road, which is the straight and narrow way.



George W. "Dub" Sands, Jr.



Over load springs used to jack a car up to accommodate loads of moonshine when hauled out of Baker County



Edna and "Dub" Sands - 1948



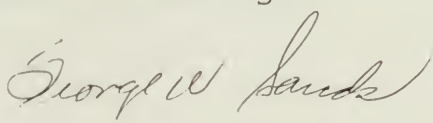
George Washington "Dub" Sands, Jr.

## George Washington 'Dub' Sands, Jr.

**Moniac/Macclenny**

*"I helped in the home brewing since I was large enough to tote a jar of syrup to the still. I been running a liquor still since I was at least six years old. Liquor was a way of survival when I was growing up, and no one could make it taste better than my daddy."*

*"Those shine cars were not made to stop until you got to where you were going because you were usually running a car wide open. There was no limit to what you could do with it, you could make it go faster than anyone would want to ride and faster than the speedometer would register."*



If you think that designing a brand new custom designed automobile right off the assembly line happens only in renowned places like Detroit, Michigan, think again. If you believe the vehicle has to be especially designed by an ace designer and draftsman to create the perfect model, think again. Nor does it take the expert skills of a mathematician, blueprint reading and mechanical experts, a machinist, chemist, engineer, physicist, laboratory technician, pattern maker, or tool and die maker with years in apprenticeship.

George W. 'Dub' Sands can do all of that singlehandedly, and right here in Baker County. The genius automaker has astonished mechanical colleagues for decades and staggered the imaginations of the craftiest masters. His custom–designed cars were for moonshiners.

Lawmen dreaded to see his creations zoom down the road at lightning speeds and quickly dismissed any idea of attempting a road block or confrontation when they saw "it" coming. They marveled in awe as they watched "it" pass unscathed into the night.

"It" might be a Dodge or Plymouth frame, but what was beneath the hood was anybody's guess except for the mastermind who put it together.

Dub Sands was born in the crook of the Georgia Bend in 1927 to Baker County pioneers George Washington and Nellie Thrift Sands. His family's 496-acre spread bordered the Florida-Georgia boundary line separated by the "big" St. Mary's River. They were a hard-working, self-sufficient couple who cultivated their land and worked hard to support their 11 children with what it produced. In the wintertime, George Sands always managed to grow a cane patch that would yield enough sugar to sweeten the moonshine pot that boiled down at the river's edge. Its proceeds were for "the hard times."

"I helped in the home brewing since I was large enough to tote a jar of syrup to the still," he said. "I been running a liquor still since I was at least six years old. Liquor was a way of survival when I was growing up, and no one could make it taste better than my daddy.

"I remember many mornings looking out across our fields in almost every direction and hearing my daddy say, 'Well fellows, I see that old man so and so is a stillin' today.' Why, all you had to do was step out in the yard and it was easy to tell who was cooking it that day because in those days they used fat-lightered wood and the smoke just billowed skyward exposing the locations."

Sands said his favorite brewed moonshine was an art performed by his dad. "I can remember the old wooden trough, hand-hewed from a cypress log by my uncle Dan Thrift. In fact," he said, "it is still at the old home place that is now owned by my brother Clyde. I can remember going to the corn crib and shucking the corn and then putting it in the old-timey corn shucker. We put the kernels in the trough near the water pump because we didn't have electricity back then. We pumped enough water to cover the corn about two inches and after a few weeks it began to sprout. It would drink a lot of water and we'd keep it covered. When it would get to boiling we would take it to the still and put it in 55-gallon barrels, add more water and wait for it to start fermenting. You could hear it frying inside and if it was real cold weather, we'd take dirt and put it up against the barrels to hold the heat so it would be real warm inside. At

the right time, we'd pour our sugar in and I can just see my uncle now, running his finger through it and testing to see if it was right. If it was, he'd say, 'Okay, boys, we got to take it up or it will vinegar on us.'"

Sands said when they got the liquor like they wanted it, his daddy would 'season' a portion. "That was the art," he said. "We'd go out in the woods and cut these Black Jack oaks down, peel all the bark off, and chisel it about as thin as you could and you'd have baskets full of it. Well, my mother would put that in an old wooden stove and parch that and it would turn brown. She knew just how long to get all that acid out of it. Then they would take barrels and put so many gallons of liquor in there and so much of the parched wood and store it in an accessible place so you could occasionally shake it. That would stay there for about six months or longer, aging, and every so often daddy would taste it to see how it was coming along. When daddy thought it was ready, they would strain it and it would be a red color from the chips. But daddy wouldn't be through with it yet. He liked to fix it so the women folks would like it. He would put it back in a clean barrel, then he'd buy boxes of dried peaches and he'd put so many of them in the brew and keep it another six months or a year. That was as mild and as pure as you could get. You could never buy it that pure and if I was now a drinking man I'd get me a little pot and I'd make me some and I'd drink all I could hold and then call my friends and see if they wanted some.

"Daddy kept it buried everywhere. One time a mule fell into our well and we found several barrels in there we'd forgotten we had. I've seen the time daddy had 300 five-gallon cans of whiskey and couldn't sell it; sometimes there was a demand for it and sometimes there wasn't.

"Daddy bought the B&W Bar in Macclenny in 1936 and got rid of the bootlegging, but the boys messed with it a little bit until one or two of them got caught and spent some time in prison. Anyway, moonshining is nothing new to me, it was there as long as I can remember and we used to do it with a mule and wagon."

Sands said he dropped out of school at the age of 16 while in the seventh grade.

"I stayed home and plowed a mule for a long time, then I took my first job in 1944 with Mr. J.J. Pribble. I made twenty-five dollars a

week in his Glen St. Mary garage working as a mechanic," he said. "I had worked on tractors around the farm, but other than that I didn't have experience. He was a good man and tried to adopt me. When I got drafted, he didn't want me to go into the service, but I left for the Army along with my first cousin, Dof Lyons and friend, Lawrence Green."

Sands only served 13 months, but obtained a vast amount of knowledge when he was sent to automotive mechanic school for eight weeks. "That was really interesting and I really learned some valuable things there."

He married Harley Burnsed's daughter, Edna, after his discharge and, with a friend, Everette Moran, bought Mr. Pribble's garage. Eventually, he left there and went to Jacksonville to work for Massey Dodge Dealership, mainly selling trucks. When Massey opened another dealership, Sands went there as a mechanic.

Meanwhile, his parents moved to north Macclenny in 1951, purchasing the 210– acre old Nath Pellum Place. Sands' oldest brother, Clyde, purchased his parent's 496 acres.

Sands moved to Jacksonville after he purchased a service station at Park and Roselle Streets. "It was a good business, but I was always thinking about Baker County," he said. "I wanted to move back home."

Before he did, he learned about another service station at San Juan and Roosevelt. His decision to purchase that one changed the course of his life. "It was there I got a lot of experience messing around with race cars," he said.

Sands met people like Frank Ironmonger, a race car winner. " I watched him very closely and what he was doing. His chief engine man was Mac Richardson. He built race cars and ran a machine shop in St. Augustine. His driver was Bill Snowden, and Frank Ironmonger's driver was Ace McCartlin. They're all dead now, but Snowden used to race with top race car drivers in the southeast, like Curtis Turner. I learned a lot from them, everything they done. They built flat–head Fords. I sponsored Frank's car and from that time on, I really got interested in fast cars. I should have been a race car driver," he said.

Then something happened that brought him back to Baker County and once more changed his life forever. "I leased a new Amoco

station on the corner of Highway 90 and SR 228. I was the first one in it, but it was too slow and no room to mechanic. Then the old Dunk Dinkins Ford building was empty so we rented that and I set up shop there," he said.

The couple first lived in a small home they rented from Ms. Sallie O'Hara located in back of the now–demolished Morris House Restaurant.

Eventually Sands leased a building from Rudolph Powers on the northwest side of the railroad tracks on SR121.

"It was when we built our garage on Highway 228 that I really got into building cars," he said. "We moved into a house next to the business, so everything was right there," he said.

"I had connections to get engines. I favored the Chrysler 300. There is no limit to what you can do with that," he said." There wasn't anyone around that could tune one of them suckers up. I bought all those type engines I could find anywhere, four and five at one time, mostly out of wrecked cars and I'd rework them, and put them in another kind of car. I put a Chrysler engine in an International pick–up for Junior Crockett, and it would haul 60 cans of liquor all day and all night. He had saddle tanks on it so he hardly ever had to stop at a gas station. It also had a Chrysler transmission and a Chrysler rear end."

It didn't take long for word to spread and the moonshiners bootlegging whiskey came around in droves.

Sands said he usually used Chrysler products like the Plymouth and Dodge. "I had a black '49 Dodge with a Chrysler–300 engine in it. It was just a little short, four– door thing, but it was a well–balanced car, the best I'd ever built. It cornered and handled better than any car and that was the name of the game. All that speed wasn't any good unless you could make the car handle well. I had a good man named Ealie Johnson in Jacksonville that did all the front–end setting. He was from Baker County and worked for Massey Dodge. With a lot of the cars, I'd take the body off, inspect the frame, and then reinforce it and do whatever it took to make sure there wasn't any weak places in it. Then I started from there, putting it back together. The big problem, and that's why they didn't use them in race cars, was that the Chrysler–300 was so heavy that one of the cylinder heads on that

thing weighed 90 pounds, and that's 180 pounds to start with. Then you got the rest of the block, so that thing would weigh 200 pounds more than the average V8 engine. But it was a work horse, it would do the job," he said, adding, "There was no limit to what you could do with it; you could make it go faster than anyone would want to ride and faster than the speedometer would register. I built one and took a feller riding with me one night and the law got after us between Hawkinsville and Macon and you couldn't tell by the speedometer how fast you were going. I said, 'Well, I just built this little old car, wonder how it's going to run,' and when the race was over that feller said, 'Well, I've never rode in a jet until now.' I can tell you the truth, anything going that fast just takes your breath."

Sands said the smaller cars such as the Plymouth and Dodge were not equipped with power brakes. "So we'd take the engine and the power brake system off the Chrysler and bolt the power system under the bottom on the frame; then you could hook up to it. Those shine cars were not made to stop until you got to where you were going because you were usually running a car wide open.

"You had to stabilize the car by installing an air bag. It's a pad you screwed up in the coil and after you put this bag in there it's got another one that fits on the bottom. It's a rubber plate with a hole in it for your valve stem to come out in the bottom and you air it up and that gives it a lot of strength. It took a lot to hold up that engine. Now, if you could get the car where it would corner right, get the front end and all that set with all this equipment on it, you'd have quite a bit of money in it. But it had to be set up right. You see, what the average mechanic didn't understand, I'd been doing it with the race cars. It was the gear ratio that was important to create in the rear axle. I can remember that if you broke it down it was a 354 ratio which means there was nine teeth on the pinion gear and 36 on the ring gear. I found out that I could get the ring gear and pinion from a man named Getts who manufactured the ring gears. For years he sent me catalogs and all kinds of information. He'd help me if he knew what kind of transmission I was going to use and the size of tires. He could help me pretty good on the gear ratio and that was very important because you've got a lot of pulling power, yet when you get on the highway,

you are going to want to get some mileage too. So you have to strike a happy medium."

Sands said he attended a carburetor school of instruction. "That Chrysler engine had two four–barrel carburetors on it and you had to synchronize them so you had to make all the linkage to hook 'em up. I threw away anything automatic on them, like the chokes. You just needed one linkage and that went from one carburetor to another. The front one had to do the same thing as the back one, so I had to make all the linkage to that. When you got them synchronized, that car would talk to you."

Sands said he has forgotten how much money he charged to build the specialized vehicles. "It wasn't enough, whatever it was," he said. "If I could get all the money I've got in my experience messing with 'em, I'd be a millionaire. A lot of it I'd do for nothing. If I made any money, I spent it all on engines," he said.

"My big problem was that I could not keep exhaust valves. If you could see in that engine, you'd see that the exhaust valve is not very big and the head of it would get cherry red. I had to put springs on the vehicle so it would pop the head of that valve off and it'd go right to the engine and tear up the butt hole and piston or whatever. A lot of 'em would keep running, and a lot of 'em would tear up, but that cost me a ton of money. You'd have to go through the whole engine, then. That went on and I had some tough luck there with hot spots. It would blow a hole in that piston and it would look like you'd shot a hole in the top of the piston with a load of buckshot. I couldn't figure out why. I couldn't whip it and it was bothering me not to know what was causing it to swallow them valves. Man, it would tear up the whole works and that was $1,500–$2,000.

"I had a friend by the name of Homer Teston. He came to Jacksonviile from Johnson City, Tennessee, and he worked for Consolidated Automotive. I went down there one day to see him and told him about my problem of not being able to keep an exhaust valve in a Chrysler–300. I told him it just swallows them things up over night. Well, there was this old man standing there, named Dutch. He had on a pair of what I called convict coveralls and was greasy from the top of his head all the way down. He had a little ole cigar in the corner of his

mouth and he looked like he was going to swallow it any minute. He said, 'Mister, if you want to listen to me, I can tell you how to fix that,' and he said, 'When you leave here, you go to the Universal Automotive Parts store and see Mr. Moody. Tell him to give you what you need to convert your exhaust valves to the new truck valves which has a sodium–cooled valve. It has a fluid in the stem and is a much bigger stem and that means you've got to change the guides and the valve seats, and all that.'

"Now, back then, them valves were $16 apiece and it takes eight of them for an eight–cylinder engine. I bought me two sets and I had me a little box that I put in the freezer and made it off limits to everybody. Now, what you do to change all of that is to press them guides out. You put all that stuff in the freezer and you have to install them while they are frozen, very quickly, one at the time, and when it comes to room temperature, you can't get it out unless you beat it out. Putting them in the freezer shrinks them. When you drop it in that head and it expands, it's there to stay. You'd have to tear it out, and the guides were the same way. Although that solved my problem, I still ain't satisfied because I need a little more speed."

Sands said that problem was solved when Junior Crockett took him to see a man who made Chrysler–300 engines. "I bought one from him for $225, came home and completely tore it apart. It had an oil pan on it and the heads, and had an intake for one four–barrel. That man didn't know what I knew. He was blowing engines, and what he was doing was loosening the valves. The main thing I needed to know from his work was what type of pistons he used in it. He was using a three and 15/16 bore. That's a good–size piston and looks about the size of a coffee can. It had a pretty dome on top of it and the imprinted name was what I needed. I found out the pistons were made in California and so I had someone call there and get me a set of 'em. They cost about $20 apiece.

"Now after that, I mean to tell you it worked; it did the job then, and I never had no problem with the bottom side of it. I had the crankshaft side mastered pretty good, but Lord, that was one engine. I don't know how many of them I built. I put the one I had bought and tore apart all back together but I didn't like his cam shaft, the part

that works the valves. From then on, I used the Chrysler–300 to build the whole car from one end to the other and I always kept enough supplies in that freezer to do what I needed to do. It took two cylinder heads to do an engine and from then on I never had anymore trouble with an engine blowing.

"Junior Crockett bought the first fuel–injection Chevrolet around here and they thought that was going to suck them Chryslers up, but mine continued to beat them. We had tire problems, like slinging the rubber off. Those cars had to be made with overload springs. See, you had a spring that you laid on to the housing and you pulled two pins and you could take the spring off and put it on and when you were not loaded, you just laid the springs in the back and all you had to do was have a bumper jack to raise it up a little bit and flip them springs. Then you were ready to load and when you got unloaded, you took the springs off and the car would sit back level again.

"We used Goodyear's Blue Streak tire when we could get them. I finally mastered not having the rubber sling off. I had a friend I met at the race track and he introduced me to a feller that would put two coats of some kind of pink rubber on them tires, mold it and then put a cap on it. When the tire wore out we recapped with that pink rubber. Some of them tires we used had been recapped as many as 12 times. I'd rather ride on his tires with that pink rubber than a brand new tire. If the cap did come off, the pink rubber would save you."

Sands said in 1953 he once again became involved in moonshine. "I liked driving the cars. A good car is just like a good saddle horse, it ain't no good if you don't have a good rider. If you don't have a good driver to take care of equipment, it ain't no good. I hauled moonshine, sometimes two loads a night, five or six times a week, or I had good drivers to take my loads for me."

Two of the best were Glen Johnson and Jimmy Lyons, he said. On one occasion, he remembers proving his point to Glen Johnson when he proved that a car loaded with shine could outrun an empty car.

"I had already arrived at the destination, unloaded and was waiting on Glen when he came driving up with the empty vehicle," he said.

"And you had to know the tricks of the trade, too. That was very important. I remember a state trooper named L.B. Boyette. He should have been a beverage agent, because he loved it so. He was always out there trying to catch us. The one thing he never learned though was to tell which of the cars was loaded. Sometimes, we would send the empty car up ahead of the shine car, and L.B. would see it coming and take off after it while the shine car went on through. He never figured out that a loaded car always sounded just like a diesel coming. We were always trying to outsmart them, and they were us," he said.

Sands remembers the only time he was ever cornered by the law. "Jimmy Lyons was driving the loaded car and I was following in a midnight-blue Chrysler. We were driving up toward Tallahassee one night. Some man had been killed at a little country store in Salem, Florida, and he had been driving a Chrysler, but the newscast said it was a white one. Well, I was running like hell, and I wasn't familiar with the roads up there, when, before I knew it, there were red lights all over. I had a boy with me and I stopped long enough to let him out and told him to stop the loaded car coming behind us and for them to get out of there. I went on and slid sideways through the road block with my lights out. I got my car behind this house, but they were close enough behind me that they saw me before the dirt had settled. Before I knew it there was this one old man who looked like he was as tall as my fireplace. He had on a pair of bib overalls and a long-barreled pistol. He stuck that long thing in there and said, 'Don't you run, you S.O.B. We got you now!' And they jerked me out of there and handcuffed me. I had $500 in five dollar bills that was bulging from my pockets and they got that. They pulled the seats all out of my car and looked in the trunk, thinking they'd find a gun that was supposed to have killed that man. Then they were going to take me on to jail, when a state trooper I knew named Woodle came up there. He told them, 'There ain't no way this boy shot anybody. If he is doing anything he's over here with Junior Crockett and his bunch hauling moonshine liquor.' Boy, they scattered like a covey of quails and they went to looking for Junior. Meanwhile, the highway patrol had jumped my loaded car going back to Perry from Madison. Jimmy out-run them

and got away and went on up to Greenville. He found a place to hide the liquor and came on back home. I was put under a $150 bond, so I took off and stopped to call home. They told me Jimmy was just driving up. I went on back and I had one hell of a time getting those boys to go back for that liquor, but finally Jimmy Lyons went back over there with me. You could see it by the side of the road. If anybody had come along and looked that way, they could have seen it. We picked it up and made our delivery and came on back home."

And there was the time he was traveling back to Baker County after delivering a load of moonshine with Jimmy Lyons as driver. They were entering Fargo, Georgia, at a high rate of speed, just before daylight one morning.

"I remember Jimmy saying, 'Okay, George, here we go,' and I heard a bamm, bamm bamm. We landed against a telephone pole upside down."

The twosome had hit a farmer driving a truck loaded with his mule. "They tell me they didn't find that mule for three days," he smiled. " The impact demolished that little Plymouth and that mule took off. We had it loaded down with sugar."

Even though it was in the days before seat belts, Sands had installed them in his cars for safety in case of such accidents. The accident left him with cuts and bruises, and Jimmy hospitalized. But, he said, it could have been much worse without the seat belts.

Today, Sands is retired, except maybe for a bit of farming. He and Edna live on an expansive stretch of land just before crossing the Georgia State line on SR 121. Instead of assembling engines for fast–moving cars, he helped to construct the couple's lovely, comfortable home. The spacious family room with its ever–glowing furnace fireplace, is filled with his sporting trophies. Large black bears peer from a corner of the room, along with deer and moose heads. Life is quieter.

"I used to drink pretty bad and the family got to worrying about me, so I went into the hospital about ten years ago to be checked over. A liver expert came in to see me and he said, 'Mr. Sands, how long have you been drinking alcoholic beverages?' I looked at him and I said, 'Well, Doc, I'll tell you the truth, because that's the only

thing I know to tell in this life, because I don't know what's going to happen in the next one, if there is a next one. But, I can faintly remember my mother bouncing me on her knee and she got a saucer and poured out this white moonshine. Then she took a match and lit it and it made a pretty blue flame. When that flame went out, she took a teaspoon and give it to me, and then a bunch more of it. For what reason, I don't know, but you asked me the question and I'm telling you I can faintly remember that.' And you know, he didn't have any more questions and he left. He sent me a bill for $100 and never told me nothing and I told him the truth. That's been a decade ago. I used to drink quite a bit, and smoked cigars, but now I've quit it all except I chew a little bit. Of course, a man has to have at least one bad habit because I don't know anyone that would like to live with someone that's perfect, do you?"

Well, that's debatable. But in any case, some people come pretty close to it. In Dub Sands case, he is a man before his time.

# The Skeeter Gainey Story

## St. George, Georgia, and Macclenny, Florida

*"I looked out toward the grave yard and saw something white with horns and the reddest eyes you've ever seen. I said, 'that's the devil', and I mean I got scared. I said, "God, let me find out for sure if it's the devil and if it is, don't let him get a hold of me."*

Marion Ernest Gainey was one of 14 children born to William Clayton and Matilda Howard Gainey in the Georgia Bend on March 30, 1941. The old, rustic, three- room clapboard home with its circular drive is where he grew up with his 12 living brothers and sisters. They were Eugene, Vivian, William (Bill) Clayton, Jr., Joe (who tragically died at the age of 17), Merel, Barbara, Ray, Tommy, Mitchell, Johnny and Mike. Two younger siblings died in infancy.

By the time he was five, he was riding the family mule through the corn field and on down to the river that flowed behind the family farm. Two empty five-gallon jugs, bound up in croaker sacks, were tied in front of the saddle and two of the same were tied behind the saddle. When he returned home, those jugs would be full of crystal- clear moonshine manufactured by his father at the antiquated family liquor still. He remembers those days as if they were yesterday.



**Matilda (Howard) and William Clayton Gainey - St. George, Georgia**



**Replica of house where Skeeter Gainey grew up near St. George, Georgia**

"The mule would automatically take it to the still, but we younguns' liked to ride, so we'd go down and drop off the four empty jugs and return with four jugs filled," he said. "It was a great experience for us to get old enough to go to the still. I felt all grown up when I saw it because it was a way of life. It meant survival, if the tobacco crop didn't come through, because what little we made from it provided clothing and other essentials our family needed."

Muscular and handsome, shy, yet talkative, the man who is now called Skeeter is particular who he talks to about his experiences in the moonshine industry. He has turned down a movie offer and the opportunity to be in a book written by a "revenuer."

"They might not understand how it was, back then," he says, "and if it's going to be told, then it needs to be told right."

Like most folks in the area, the Gainey family lived on a farm and worked from sun-up to sun-down, grubbing a living from the soil that provided them with corn and potatoes to eat and tobacco to sell for family necessities, like shoes and clothes. Their water was drawn from a bucket well, and the smokehouse was usually filled with smoked hams and sausages, the annual staple meat preserved after butchering hogs in the fall. It was hard work, and no conveniences. There was no electricity or indoor plumbing. The family used a one-seat outhouse, or, he said, "We went behind the barn if we didn't have time to get to the outhouse, which was located a good piece from the house."

"We used corn cobs or the Sears catalog back then because there was no such thing as toilet paper," he said. "And it was amazing that certain pages never got torn out of the catalog. Guess which pages that was?" he asked with a grin. "It was the lingerie section. That was our pornography in those days!"

The family owned a battery powered radio. "Us kids would listen to Cisco and Poncho, the Lone Ranger, and, on Saturday nights, our greatest treat was to listen to the Grand Ole Opry. We had an old cypress pole that had a copper wire running up it to try and get better reception, but it would fade in and out about the time everything got to picking and grinning real good. You'd just hold your breath until the music came back.

"My grandparents lived on adjoining land. Their names were Lewis and Pinkie Jo Bennett Gainey. They, like our parents, really worked hard to make a living. In those days, none of us had conveniences. Even with her big family, Mama still helped in the fields. She canned and preserved our food under the most primitive conditions. The kitchen was not attached to the house, and the three rooms in our house all had beds in them. We grew tobacco, always hoping for good weather to make a crop. If the tobacco crop made, then we would gather it and hang it on sticks in the barn to dry. Then, we would take it to market to sell, hoping to get paid enough to pay off our bills for the plants and fertilizer we had previously charged down at the local store.

"We bought sugar in 100–pound bags because we needed that for making our moonshine. I remember some of the sugar bags had an imprint, 'Made in Cuba'. Mama made all our shirts out of the material after she bleached the bags to get the color and imprint out. She used an old pedal sewing machine.

"Daddy made the shine to help us make a little extra money for clothes. We didn't have a car while I was home. My parents used a mule and wagon until the 1950's, so people would usually come up to the house to buy what moonshine we made. Clarence Johns of Macclenny bought lots of it. He peddled whiskey for years and sold it in pints and I have a



**Marion Ernest "Skeeter" Gainey**
**1994**

copper funnel out there in the old shed somewhere that came from Clarence's house that some of my daddy's whiskey was poured through. If I remember right, Clarence came after his moonshine in a 1941 Ford Coupe.

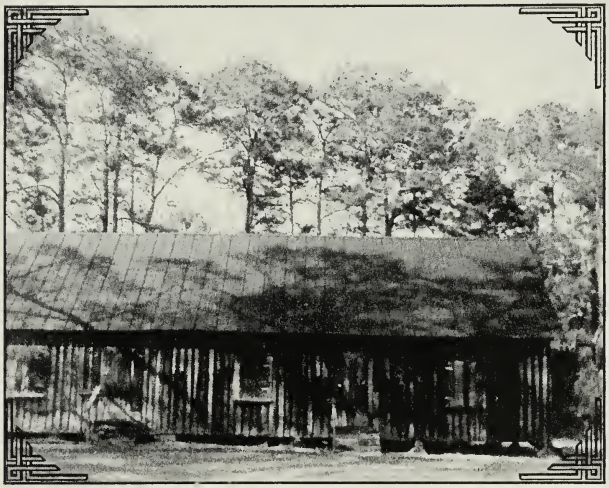
"Do you know why bootlegging was originally called bootlegging?" he asked with a grin. "The name originated during prohibition days when people would stash a pint in their boots, or tie it onto their leg. Back then making moonshine wasn't illegal, just illegal if you didn't pay taxes to the government. The moonshine name came about because people making it used fat–lightered wood and it caused such a smoke that they would have to make it at night or be spotted by the revenuers.

"That was in the early days," he said. "By the time I came along, they had graduated from lightered knots to kerosene burners -- galvanized tanks that would hold about 15 gallons of kerosene. You would have to take a tire pump and pressurize it. It was real hard work.

"When we got big enough to help with the whiskey, we thought we were real grown up," he remembered. "And we had more responsibility. I knew it was against the law, but I didn't look at it as a shameful thing, like dealing with crack, marijuana or cocaine or stuff like it is today. It was just a way to have enough money for our family to exist. We really had it hard even with the extra we made from the moonshine.

"I remember walking barefoot the three miles to school before the bus started picking us up, in weather so cold, icicles would pop up out of the hard ground. We had radiators in the school rooms at St. George and my feet would be so cold that when I first put my foot to 'em I wouldn't even feel it, my feet were so numb. Mama managed to keep us in overalls, and some kind of little jacket, but we'd be so cold. Mama wanted us to go to school. She only had a fourth grade education, but she could write good. She wrote beautiful poems, even some about bootlegging and the revenuers."

By the age of 13, he had been arrested for making illegal moonshine. The year was 1954. "I was with my father in this little old still behind the farm there. We'd had it for years, you know, so some-



**Emmaus Church established 1868**
**Charlton Co., Ga.**

body turned us in, most likely. It was the Federal guys, Mueller and Maine, I remember. They called one of 'em 'Yank' because he used to play baseball with the New York Yankees. They caught us, just me and dad. We both got probation. They tore our still up. They beat the oak barrels in and we were not able to patch 'em back, so we had to start over.

"I think dad felt the worst about me getting caught, like you would your kids. We found another spot further down the creek, and then I got caught again when I was 15 at the new still. Dad, too. This time, he got three years in Tallahassee and I got two years in Natural Bridge, Virginia, Federal prison.

"I was treated good in Federal prison. Dad and I wrote one another while we were in prison and he'd write who all was there that we might know, like a lot of people from Baker and Charlton counties. While I was in prison, I attended school, but I dropped out when I got out and finished years later. I did eighty percent of my sentence. When I was released, they gave me a suit of clothes and a little money, just enough to feed me on the way home. They gave me one of those Air Force Bomber jackets, and I wish I had kept that, I'd love to own it today. I didn't write anyone that I was coming home. I rode the bus to Folkston, Georgia, and arrived there at night. I walked over to the jail and knocked on the door. The sheriff was an old gentleman by the name of Jim Sikes. He came to the door and said, 'Can I help you, son?', and I told him I needed a ride to St. George. He said, 'Give me time to get dressed.' His wife went with us and we talked all the way.

He was a good old gentleman. Back then, nobody locked the doors, so I just walked on in the house. Mama had moved a little closer to St. George when me and daddy went to prison. Everybody got up and mama started cooking breakfast.

"I never got along with mama too much; I think we were too much alike. I was the only one who had her hair color and all the rest of the family looked like dad. She had dark hair, and dad had blond with blue eyes. Mama gave me some severe punishment a few times with gallberry switches. I've still got scars on my back and legs to this day. I was a rebellious-type person from an early age and still that way today. Daddy never whipped me, he used his voice, and that is the same way I've raised my kids. I've never whipped them; I use my voice, and they've all turned out real good.

"Maybe I'm wrong, but I think I got more whippings than any of them. I don't know if I led everybody into getting into trouble or what, but I didn't stay home after I got 13, even though I was on probation after I got out of prison. I might hitch-hike to Zephyr Hills and be gone for three or four months and nobody would know where I was at. I'm still that way, just like now. When I start out the door, I hate to tell Carolyn where I'm going, even if I'm just going to the Jiffy Store, but I like to know where she's going.

"Anyway, after my probation, I got a bad whipping, I mean a bad one. I left that time and never stayed there permanently again. I'd just come in and out and if she started fussing at me, I'd go. I'd leave. Daddy never interfered.

"Now, mama was a good woman, and she caught hell, too. She raised 12 of us. Her oldest child only weighed two pounds when he was born, but his twin, a little girl weighed ten pounds. She died after birth. She had another little girl named Beatrice that lived four or five weeks before she died. Daddy lay drunk a lot and Mama had to do the providing. I lay it all to that. I don't blame mama for it. I drank like dad. I was a teen-age alcoholic. I started drinking at nine years old. I couldn't even pick up a five- gallon jug. I could lean it over and fill up a glass with it. I'd lay out in the woods passed out for hours, drunk. Me and my brother, Joe, would go to square dances at Miller's Corner between St. George and Hilliard. We'd always take shine with

us and while he was inside dancing I'd be outside passed out. I started liking the girls when I was about 14 or 15 so; when I got out of prison at age 16, I started working for myself, not dad.

"Junior Yarbrough had a car lot next to the Midget Burger on Main Street in Macclenny, so I went and asked Junior if he'd sell me a car on credit. He said, 'Well, go out there and pick you out one,' and he said, 'When can you pay me?'. I told him I'd have to haul a few loads of shine and when I'd made a little profit I'd come back and pay for the car. So, he let me have it. I always went for Chrysler products, so I picked out a Chrysler and went and bought some whiskey on credit as well. I got me some contacts and started hauling 'shine to Haines City, Gainesville, and different places. Back then you could buy whiskey stashed out in the woods for about twelve dollars a jug and haul it down state and get twenty five dollars for it. So doubling my money, I accumulated enough to build my own stills, eventually.

"At this time, they had advanced from scratch–feed whiskey to groundhog whiskey. Catfish Stokes built the still, which was a 40–barrel still that I could put 1,800 pounds of sugar in and 200 pounds of wheat brand and 14 pounds of yeast. About every four days, I'd turn out about 70 jugs of whiskey. I was making my own and hauling it. As my profits increased, I would put up another still. I hired some help, but mostly I did it myself and got my car paid off.

"I had a '54 Chrysler that Dub Sands souped up the motor. It had two four–barrel carburetors in it, and there was very little that could keep up with it. I started making good money. I blew a lot of it, gave away some. I had so much money, I thought I'd never need any more money for the rest of my life. I kept it in sacks, in the car, or somewhere like that."

The moonshine profession was hard work, he said, and, unlike what some people think now or thought then, while the money might have been good, it didn't come easy. It was a way to survive during a time jobs for the uneducated and untrained were scarce.

"I had this guy working for me who had one eye. We were about the same age. I had a still about five miles below Saint George on the creek back of Emmaus Primitive Baptist Church, located in the 'Bend' section of Charlton County. It's really a historical

church and mama wrote a poem about it once. It was started in 1868 and the old church still has spit holes in the floor for the old timers to spit their tobacco, and they could do it and never miss the hole," he laughed. "There was no fence around it at the time, so we'd pull up by the old oak tree behind the church to unload all our paraphernalia.

"All that heavy stuff had to be hauled down to the still by hand and caution taken to hide our tracks so we would not be followed. I'll never forget this particular night because that's when I got my name Skeeter and I've been called that ever since. There was an old drainage ditch that was always filled with water running toward the river, so we'd take and wade in that water far enough to hide our tracks. Then we'd come up on a little bank and walk on down to the still. On this particular night, that this boy was helping me, the mosquitoes were so thick you could swing a pint jar and catch a quart of 'em. They were so thick that they were all over me and I was saying dirty words and cussing and carrying on and he started calling me Skeeter. We got into two or three scrapes over it because I didn't want to be called that, but after I got to thinking about it, I thought, 'Well, it sounds better than what I'm being called now,' so it stuck with me through the years.

"One particular night I was out there by myself when he couldn't help me and it was time to run the still. I had this '54 Chrysler with the seats out and overload springs and it was loaded down with paraphernalia. I had a groundhog still where you put 1800 pounds of sugar in 'em, 14 pounds of yeast, and 200 pounds of wheat brand and it all had to be toted to the still. We had graduated from kerosene to propane by this time and it took four propane bottles to run that 70 jugs of whiskey.

"Just as I started unloading it about 10 p.m., there came up a thunderstorm and lightning started flashing. I heard a noise and it was sorta a bleating noise like babababababa, just an awful noise. The hair stood up on top of my head and I started graying right there. I'm serious, back then we were always pulling tricks on one another and that's what I thought was happening, so I just reached back and started getting more stuff from my car to set under the oak trees.

"After I got it all out of the car, I parked the car by the river and walked back to start toting all the stuff to the still. Just as I did, this big clap of lightning struck again, and I heard this terrible noise once more. I

looked out toward the grave yard and saw something white with horns and the reddest eyes you've ever seen. I said, 'That's the devil,' and I mean I got scared. I was the type that I thought, now someone may still be playing a trick on me and I'm not going to leave until I find out. The noise was coming from in the middle of the cemetery and I was so scared that the hair was standing straight up on my neck and chill bumps were all over me. Every time the lightning would strike I could see it.

"Finally I said, 'Well, I've got to find out what this is,' so I got my old '32–20' pistol –– I've still got the very one –– and I reached under the seat. I was afraid to cock it, my hand was just a–shaking. I said, 'That's either the devil or someone is playing a trick on me, and I'm not going to leave until I find out' so I started walking that way, just knowing I was going to catch the devil. We were always taught at home that there was a heaven and hell and Jesus Christ and the devil, and that the devil had horns.

"As I got a little closer and could hear the noise better and see the figure when the lightning struck, I'd made up my mind it was the devil and I said a little prayer. I said, 'God, let me find out for sure if it's the devil; if it is, don't let him get a–hold of me.' I had a flash light in my hand. We moonshiners always carried a flashlight because we had to carry the tip of 'em in our mouths since our hands were always full, and the next day my mouth would be so sore, but that's the way we done it.

"When I got up close to it, I could see that there was an open grave the grave diggers had dug that afternoon. In it was a big old Billie goat, one of them that roamed the woods. It had fallen into that grave and that's what it was. He was up on his back feet and I could see his two front legs and eyes a–shining and looking my way with his horns. I helped him get out when I calmed down. I kept saying, 'Thank you, Lord, Thank you, Lord, Thank you.'

"It wasn't long after that people began to say, 'You're turning gray–headed,' and I was. That damn Billie goat scared me to death. I moved that still from there because after that I had such a weird feeling.

"The next time I located near an old abandoned house where someone had been murdered. A man had beat his wife to death with one of those sticks you hang a hog up with, and they say as she ran around that house it splattered blood all around on the walls. I don't

know why I put the still there because every time I went by the place I thought of that. Well, Catfish Stokes had built me two good little stills and they were all sweetened up and there came up a bad storm one night. The rain was hitting me so hard it felt like hail, so I got into my little still buggy and got stuck right away, so I had to walk about two miles to that old house. It was so cold and I was shaking all over, just about to freeze to death.

"When I got there, I noticed many of the boards on the front porch were missing but I wouldn't go inside, so I crawled up against the wall on the front porch. The wind was blowing so hard, and I was really cold and miserable. I finally couldn't stand it, so I got up to go inside. I had always heard that dried blood would actually cause a reflection like a lightning bug, so I crawled up in a corner where no wind could reach me. The windows and doors to the old house had been busted out and the wind just blew right on through. Each time the lightning struck, I could see spots of that woman's blood glowing. I sat there shaking and finally said, 'I can't stand this anymore,' so I walked three or four miles to where I was staying to get some dry clothes. Later, I found my helper, who went back in there and finished running the two stills for me."

Eventually the stills were blown up by revenuers, he said. "After that I put five stills up. My goal was seven. I hired a couple of guys, but I was still hauling most of it. Finally, I reached my goal and had me seven stills. I was into moonshining big time now. There were some big elaborate underground stills in the county and they even had bedrooms and a kitchen in them. You could even drive a car inside them to load up. I hauled the moonshine from my stills and for others as well. I had so much money at one time I had trouble finding a place to put it. I had more than $80,000 stashed away in a suit box I kept in my car.

"Later, most moonshiners got into what we called double–trucking. We'd have an old cut–down vehicle with an old wooden bed on the back of it we called a still buggy. It would usually have a windshield but no hood. Just a junkyard thing. We'd find us a road that had a thick palmetto patch where we'd hide it. We'd put long boards across the ditch to walk across and load all our stuff on the still buggy. Then, we'd drive the still buggy with our supplies to where the still was located and unload. We'd have to bring our shine out the same way, and hide the

signs where our vehicles had been. Most of the time this was all done at night and we'd have to go back in the morning as soon as the sun came up to verify that we'd done a good job hiding our tracks from the revenuers. This way you wouldn't have to tote all your equipment so far to the still, which was backbreaking work.

"Sometimes we'd find a good place where somebody lived in the back woods and, maybe, go through their cow pasture to a creek or pond, anything that held water.

"With seven stills, I now had several cars, plenty of money and hired four persons to work for me. My stills could run about 14 quarts of whiskey a minute. I paid $2 a jug for someone to make it, and $1 a jug to haul it. You could haul about 65 jugs of whiskey on one of them cars in a two– or three–hour trip, so that was good money. If you wanted, you could turn around and make another trip. I was clearing about $1,200 per still or $10,000 a week. I bought some land, but sold it; I should have kept it, because I got caught again and had to serve more prison time. I left my suit box of money –– more than $40,000 –– with a girl friend, and when I got out she had bought a car and spent most of the rest.

"Have you ever seen the movie, 'Cool Hand Luke?'" he wanted to know. "Well, that is just about how I found it in prison. I got four years from Judge Ben Hodge in Folkston, Georgia, and was put on the Georgia chain gang. You know these big gigantic rocks under the bridges in Georgia? Well, I put lots of 'em there. I transferred from Waycross to Reidsville. If you misbehaved there, they put you in the hot box and you were given bread and water. I was refusing the bread and water when I came down with mumps and went down from 185 pounds to 135. I lost lots of muscle and was transferred to Reidsville Hospital where I regained my health. I was still at Reidsville when they had their last electrocution.

"During this time, there was a murder there and pieces of body were flushed down the commode. I saw them beat one man to death who tried to slip a letter out in an attempt to escape. One man said he personally knew of 18 that had been killed there but it was always reported to be death by natural causes. A lot of things went on there that I knew about. I was rebellious and if a guard raised his voice at someone else, I felt I just had to put my two cents worth in. I've been beaten and chairs busted over my head and I'd go right back in the hot box. I don't

consider myself a dangerous person, but I don't let people mess with me, or cross me. I never had any trouble making friends, and people seemed to like me because I tried to be honest. If I owed you I paid you.

"While I was in Federal Prison, I was sent to Petersburg, Virginia, and started back in school. I took auto mechanics. In November of '65 I got out and went and bought me another car from Junior Yarbrough on a credit. He sold me a white Plymouth. I bought a load of whiskey and hauled it to Valdosta and on the way I ran out of gas. If I'd known it was a gas hog I would have carried some gas with me, but I didn't. One of the five-gallon cans was leaking and you could smell the whiskey real strong. The first thing that pulled up behind me was a state trooper. I got out of my car and walked back to his, so he wouldn't smell the whiskey. He said, 'What's the matter?' and I said, "Well, I'm out of gas of all things,' and he said, 'Well, it's not too far to the station up there, I'll run you in and bring some gas back,' and I said, 'I'll get a way back, you don't need to, you need to be watching this highway,' and he said, 'No, I'll bring you back.' So he took me and I put a deposit on the gas can, and the trooper took me back. We were driving back on the expressway and about the time we got back to my car, another car came by going about 100 mph eastbound. He said, "I'll check on you later, I got to go catch this man,' and I said, "I appreciate it, man.' I got my car going, and that was the last load of whiskey I hauled in that direction.

"One night, I came out of Nahunta where we went through a cow pasture. I was hauling it from Nahunta across to Jacksonville. I came in on Old Kings Road, to hit Lane's Avenue. When I got to Beaver Street, my car shut off. The first thing that pulled up behind me was a policeman, at three o'clock in the morning. I had five-gallon cans in the car. I said, 'Man, my car won't crank, can you push me off?' and he said, 'No, I'll call someone to get you going,' and I said, 'I need a push now, I'm running late.' He told me he wasn't supposed to, but he pushed me off, then turned around and went another way. That was my next incident after Valdosta and I said, 'Man, someone's trying to tell me something.'

"By then, I was an habitual crime offender. I'd already been convicted three times, and I could get 10 years the next time, so when I met Carolyn shortly after that, I did just a little bit, not much, before getting out of it. There just wasn't no way I could do 10 years."

Skeeter married pretty Carolyn Long, daughter of Hugh and Irene Long of Macclenny in 1966. "We liked each other at first sight," said his pretty, petite wife. "We met one Friday and the following Friday he asked me to marry him. We went to the judge's office to get our license and two weeks later to the day, we got married," she said. " No one thought it would work out because we were both such independent persons, but it has lasted 29 years."

When the couple met, Carolyn said she knew Skeeter was working in moonshine. "Yes, I knew he was dealing in moonshine," she said. "But back then, we didn't think too much about it, everyone seemed to be connected in some way or the other to it. I was surprised I felt that way, because my brother was a police officer, my father a part–time deputy, my sister was a police officer and I had a nephew who worked in homicide."

Carolyn's father, Hugh Long, worked part–time for Baker County Sheriff Ed Yarbrough. Skeeter remembers the Baker County sheriff with respect. "I can't say anything bad about Ed. He was always firm, but fair," he said. "I remember riding through Baker County one time in a '55 Mercury and the sheriff pulled in behind me. I pulled into a truck stop and he pulled in behind me. I said, 'Damn, I hate to get caught with empties,' because that's all I had in the car, but back at that time you could have whiskey or any paraphernalia and it carried the same offense. Well, I pulled back on the highway and he followed me right on. When I passed the inspection station he pulled in and turned around, so from then on when I went to Gainesville, I went through Baxter and Sanderson on 229 to Lake Butler. He had probably seen me before, but I got his message to stay out of Baker County. I knew he'd stop me the next time. I respected him. I didn't come back."

The young couple was given land by her parents across from where she grew up. "Our first home was a trailer," said Carolyn, "but in a short time we began building our present home and through the years have added to it.

Skeeter began lawful employment with Florida Wire and Cable Company in Jacksonville. Before long, he worked up to a crew leader, then went on to become a supervisor.

"When the company opened the plant in Sanderson I was selected to start it up and was made the plant superintendent," he said. "I was in charge of cross–training everybody. I returned to school to get my GED. I don't know how I passed, but I did. Then I took some Dale Carnegie courses, and a business and management course at Florida Community College of Jacksonville (FCCJ) at night," he said.

Soon the personable man who had lived mainly in the backwoods of Charlton County, driving souped up vehicles laden with illegal moonshine, was travelling around the United States representing his company and spiralling upward to reach the top supervisory slot.

"If I had it to do over again, there are some things I would change," he says, in a deliberate slow drawl. "I'd be a little better at it, and I would buy land with all my excess money."

One thing he would not change is his marriage. "I never thought about getting married and having a family until I met Carolyn," he said. "We've been very happy."

The couple adopted two children and had one together. "If we had all the children I lost, along with the two we adopted, we'd have had nine children," said Carolyn. "I only carried one baby full term," she said.

Skeeter's criminal record was no obstacle to adopting Lori, who is now married to Daniel Moody, or Ernest, Jr. who , with his wife Lynn Hodges, have two daughters, Kristy and Delaney. Their biological son is Clay.

"Both my boys are 6 foot 4 inches," he says with obvious pride.

It is easy to see where the couple places their priority. It is their family. Photos grace every wall and table.

Skeeter retired in January 1993 from Wire Mill. "Today, I just spend my time fishing or riding the woods, thinking about my moonshine days," he said. "Sometimes it doesn't even seem real, but it was, and the way I've told it is just the way it happened to me."

## 'MUELLER and MAINE'

**Investigators Hans K. Mueller and William H. Maine, Alcohol & Tobacco Tax, working out of Waycross, Georgia, office.**

[Written by **MRS. MATILDA GAINEY,** St. George, Ga., a small town on the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp, Charlton County, Georgia.]

*St. George was once a nice little town,*
*Until Mueller and Maine got to hanging around.*
*The poor folks here at least they could eat,*
*And sometimes even give their families a treat.*

*The law got rough about two years ago,*
*And Uncle Sam said, "Boys, this bootleggin' must go."*
*Mueller and Maine caught 'em 'til the jails over–flowed,*
*And they were sentenced by a Judge from way down the state,*
*While the wives and children were left home to wait*
*For the father's return from the sentence he gave,*
*And the poor mothers worked back home like a slave.*

*The planes would fly by and the cars go scurrying,*
*While Mueller and Maine got on with their hurrying,*
*So maybe they'd know whose pot they had found,*
*Before they got going with that dynamite sound.*

*Sometimes it seemed the country was at war,*
*With dynamite a sounding from a near and a far,*
*The houses would rattle and the earth would shake,*
*For Mueller and Maine had made another rake.*

*They got the bootleggers down to their last measly dime,*
*And couldn't see how they'd set up a still another time,*
*But the boys figured out a plan even from behind,*
*To set up a still of a more different kind.*

*They made them a still of two old drums,*
*And when they got started the burner did hum.*
*The whiskey would pour in a great big stream,*
*And the bootleggers eyes once more did gleam,*
*For they thought Mueller and Maine,*
*Had just been out–smarted again.*

*It began to get hard to get any sugar,*
*So they named their new still a precious little lugger*
*The bootleggers had lots of fun I do know,*
*With Mueller and Maine a hunting stills so.*

*But when at last they found that lugger,*
*Mueller and Maine were as mad as a bugger,*
*For when they charged in on it like a bear,*
*All they did find was exactly nobody there*

*But they kept up their slip, slide, sneak and crawl,*
*Until be darned if they just about ain't got 'em all.*

In Memory of Mama
MATILDA HOWARD GAINEY
By her son, Skeeter

*If I could give my Mother...all the flowers she has earned–*
*She would have flowers, to infinity and then some.*
*She gave birth to fourteen children,*
*She loved us all the same.*
*She buried three, eleven still remain:*
*I never understood how hard her life must have been*
*To feed and clothe us so we could grow to be women and men.*
*All she had while she was alive,*
*Was hard times, trouble and a will to survive*
*Thank you Mama for everything you have done*
*And I'll tell the world I'm proud to be your son!*

A PRISONER'S PRAYER
Written by Matilda Howard Gainey
For her son Skeeter when he was in prison

*When ever I have served my sentence, God,*
*I pray that I will be*
*A credit to my country*
*And to my community.*
*That I may never stray*
*Beyond your ten commandments*
*Or what any law may say*
*For I have learned my lesson God*
*And I would start a new*
*To walk in good society*
*And live my life for you.*
*I want to put away my past*
*And build a future bright*
*With honesty and decency*
*And all I know is right*
*That I may gain your blessings God*
*And my eternal goal*
*And by my good example*
*May save another's soul*

GAINEY STREET
By Matilda Gainey

*Gardenias are blooming*
*The air is so sweet*
*The sun is shining brightly*
*On Gainey Street*
*The day is about over*
*Tomorrow will surely come*
*No matter what it brings,*
*It shall be a happy one*
*For those who look ahead*
*And hope for the best*
*And leave it up to Jesus*
*And he will do the rest*
*He will surely watch over*
*And protect us from harm*
*And securely protect*
*With His loving arms.*
1975

OLD EMMAUS
By Matilda Gainey

*Old Emmaus has stood for many years*
*She has sheltered many joys*
*She has sheltered many tears*
*She sheltered the meek*
*She sheltered the bold*
*She sheltered the rich*
*She sheltered the poor*
*That's why we can't understand*
*Why the devil would sen some evil hands*
*To try to destroy the poor old thing*
*When she has done no evil to any man*
*I know God protected her there*
*Or the hand of the devil could have stripped her bare*
*The land would be saddened*
*The tombs would be bare*
*Thank you Lord Jesus*
*For protecting her there.*

I AM NOT THERE
by Matilda Gainey

*Do not stand at my grave and weep*
*I am not there.*
*I do not sleep, I am a thousand winds,*
*I am the diamond glints on snow*
*I am the sun light on ripened grain,*
*I am the gentle autumn rain*
*When you awake in the mornings hush*
*I am the swift upflinging rush of quiet birds in circling flight*
*I am the soft star shine at night*
*Do not stand at my grave and cry*
*I am not there.*
*I did not die*

# Tommy Gerald Johns

**Macclenny, Florida**

*"I remember one time one of my friends came to the house to buy some whiskey and daddy asked him if he was old enough. I reckon he was trying to do a little right."*

*"Daddy used to haul whiskey to Al Capone's gang down in Miami, and they would hide their whiskey in the shafts of their hotels."*

*"If I was going to bring a friend home with me after school, I'd look the situation over before I'd bring them in."*

*"Daddy hauled whiskey to the Queen of the Bootleggers, Sue Cause, down in Miami. I remember feeling so honored that she had come to visit us when she got out of prison."*

Tommy Johns



**(L to R): Novie Johns Eddins, nephew Tommy Johns and Lois Johns Lard holding photo of Jessie Prevatt Johns, wife of Ernest and mother of 16 children**

From the front room of the house where he grew up in north Macclenny, Tommy Johns spins a tale that even amazes him.

"I get to telling all this to people and sometimes I get to wondering if I'm telling the truth about all the things that happened here," he said.



**Kathryn (Davis) and Clarence Johns**

Born in 1938 to Kathryn (Davis) and Clarence Johns, he probably knows more about the people of Macclenny and Baker County during the days of card games and gambling, moonshine making, bootlegging, and drag-car-racing than any other person living in the area today. He was named in honor of his father's favorite moonshiner, Tommy Holland, of Jacksonville.

From the time he was a small child, he was keenly observant and can chatter off story after story of the extraordinary era he astonishingly lived through. His maternal and paternal lineages connect him in close-knit kinship to almost every major family in Baker County. He is exceptionally likeable, with scores of friends, and his remarkable life has revolved around most of them in a very personal way.

Tommy Johns' life has certainly been no Sunday School picnic. It has been one round of parties, drinking, fast cars, gambling, and moonshine whiskey. He was a senior in high school when his younger brother, Jimmy, was born. He had an older half-brother, George Wray Rhoden. In the atmosphere he lived, he grew up fast. The front room of his parent's modest north Macclenny home was always open to the community, and almost everyone who was someone, and many who were not, lodged there, sometimes for days on end. Some came for a weekend and stayed for years.

"I don't remember a time when there wasn't whiskey dealings, card games and gambling going on in our house," he said. "I can remember most things pretty good from the time I was six years old. For a while my daddy's sister, my Aunt Novie, and her husband, Lloyd Eddings, lived with us, right back there in that back bedroom. Uncle Lloyd killed a man up there on Highway 90 at Frances Grill in 1941. In 1943, they came to spend a weekend with us and stayed here six years. They moved out in 1949 and then my Uncle Dickie (Davis) got married in 1950, and he and his wife moved in that same bedroom for about a year.

"For awhile, we all used the same bathroom, but in 1952 daddy had another one built. Now that was something back in them days to have a couple of bathrooms in your house, because I can even remember when we had an outdoor toilet.

"Grandpa (Richard) Davis had this old house built. I was up there in the attic one day and found where Andra Mobley had signed his name on the rafters in July, 1933."

"By day, and by night, people came to the house for at least 11 years, and especially during the war. We were one of the first families to get a television set and everyone would gather here to see it, especially the big fights. They'd be sitting all around, even be up and down the halls, even standing on the outside, whites and blacks. I remember how we'd come in here and look at the test patterns waiting on the TV to come on. Howdy Doody would come on first thing. We never thought anything about it. To us it was a way of life."

A way of life was selling moonshine from the house in pints, half–pints, fifths, a gallon, or even five gallons, if you wanted it.

"Daddy made, bought, sold and hauled whiskey. In 1943, he started bottling and selling it here at the house. We'd store it in the attic, and bring it down at night by the five– gallon jugs. We'd bottle about 32 halves, 16 pints and 8 fifths, except on weekends or holidays we'd bring down more. We bought our bottles from Duval Spirit and Bottle Company out of Jacksonville.

" When we first started out doing it, kids would bring us used bottles and mama and daddy would pay them two cents apiece. You could see little kids coming up the street and it was nothing to see them with a half–pint in each pocket, and he'd make himself four or six cents, how ever many bottles he had. We would wash them out and use them to bottle our whiskey.

"For years, we had big card games at our house and some people would play for days without leaving. We made good money. I've seen some of the people bring sacks full of money in here and play for days at the time. It was just a scheduled thing and daddy would cut the pot about every other hand for a dollar. I had me a little shelf where I sold cigarettes and chewing gum, and candy and such as that. I had me a bank account back when Coca–Colas were a nickel.

"People would come and go all the time and I've seen cars parked all over everywhere and almost to Highway 90. They'd be playing music up here and have two card games going at one time, and I mean big money, some of the biggest and most influential people in– and out–of–town came. People from Jacksonville came, like Sheriff Rex Sweat and some of his deputies. I can remember four or five guns laying over there on that big table in their holsters that the detectives would take off while they played. "Some people would lay down and sleep an hour or two, especially if they got hooked, you know, and just play on through the night and into the next day. I'd go to bed when I got sleepy. I could sleep right through it. Mama always had something cooked and they'd usually leave her nice tips, and as Aunt Novie always said, it was just like one big happy family. I never remember no arguments, or anyone acting up or being ugly or using bad language. If there was, I don't remember it. It was a fun life because I knew everybody and everybody knew me. And the people, when they gambled, would relate funny stories, and if they told a joke unsuitable, they'd ask me to leave, because I was younger. Even when I got older they'd say, 'Tommy, why don't you go in the next room?–– and I would.

"I enjoyed it when some of my great uncles would come over here and sit and visit in the front room. They'd buy a pint of whiskey and when it got time for 'em to take a drink they'd get up and go to the back of the house to do it. They'd just sit and talk for hours. I remember how one of my uncles, during the war, would get to drinking and he'd take his old knife out and go to sharpening it, and he'd say, 'I'm going to cut that old Mussolini's mustache and Tojo. And Hitler, I'm going to get him too.' And everyone would laugh. People came here to drink and play cards just like they do at the 121 Club, and they were regulars for years.

"Some of them were real interesting too, like Tinsey McEwen. He'd come here to watch the 64 Million Dollar Question on television and I remember that before they'd get the question finished, he would answer it. He was real smart. People were regulars and we expected them, you know, they just came to fellowship and drink and enjoy the music –– someone was always playing music.

"And they'd come at all hours, day and night, to buy whiskey or do business with daddy. I could tell, just like mama and daddy, who it was that knocked on the door and what kind of whiskey to go and get and how much. I knew if I was to put it on their charge account, or if they would pay. I'd go write it down on a pad. Everyone had their own knock, their own characteristics.

"If I was going to bring a friend home with me after school, I'd look the situation over before I'd bring them in. I had as good a mama and daddy as you could get, but it was a strain sometimes, as I grew older. You know, like when I'd go to birthday parties, like to the homes of people like the Gilberts, the Frasers or Hiers. But, I want to make one thing clear. They were always nice to me and treated me like a perfect gentleman. They were just people that never messed with whiskey in their life, but they all treated me like anybody else. I always had an inner fear that something would come up about what mama and daddy did. Mama and daddy always would tell me they didn't ever want me to mess with it. Daddy would say, 'I want you to get an education and go to college.' They'd say, 'This life is no good, can't you see it is a strain living like this?' and daddy would say, 'I don't like doing it, but I have to provide for you and your mama. I don't have any education or another way to make a living.' Daddy had about a fifth grade education.



**Jessie Prevatt Johns ca 1940 mother of 16 children, wife of Ernest Johns, mother of Clarence Johns**

"Daddy's mama had 16 children in 24 years. His parents, Jessie (Prevatt) and Ernest Johns, did the best they could raising their big family. I remember how grandma loved her children, and she'd better not catch any of them talking about the other one. She'd stop them right in their tracks, and she'd say, 'Hold it! You're talking about your brother or sister.' Grandma knew when each one was born; she remembered their birthdays. Two of her children, Junior and Carl, died when they were little. Besides daddy there was an infant that died, and



**In later years Jessie Prevatt Johns, mother of Clarence Johns**

then Nellie, Freddie, Thelma, Jennie, Shep, Novie, Carl, Junior, Lonnie, Bobby, Lois, Virginia, another infant that died, and Eugene (Lefty). Grandma lived to bury seven of her children. Today, Thelma, Novie, Virginia and Eugene are all that are living.

"But daddy went away to prison when he was a teen-ager in the place of an uncle who was caught with moonshine. He just turned himself in and gave his name as Colonel Johns which was his daddy's brother. I think daddy was always a little embarrassed about them times he pulled in prison. He served two times before he married mama.

"He was shot up pretty bad in Titusville, Florida, running from the law. He ran a road block, and they chased him and shot at him. Daddy run and got away and crawled under a house. There was a boy walking his girl to the door, saying good-night and they saw daddy crawl under the house, so they called and reported it. The law surrounded the house and just stuck their shotguns under there and started shooting. Daddy had pulled up and was hanging onto the rafters, but he still got a bunch in the back and legs. Somehow, he ran out from there and was running down the road. The bullets kept knocking him down and he said he thought he was falling because he was trying to run fast. He stayed in the hospital a long time before serving prison time. For the rest of his life, you could still see the bullets when they took x-rays. That's when daddy started selling whiskey from the house. Times were hard and it was during the war. He had a kidney taken out and we didn't have any money. I know it must have been Grandpa Davis who was feeding us.

"I can remember one Christmas, we were so poor after daddy had his kidney taken out. There was no substance or programs available back then to help and daddy couldn't work. I got a ball that Christmas, that's all, and I'll never forget it had stars on it. I remember that I felt very fortunate to even get the ball and I slept with it for a long time so no one would take it away from me. And the next

Christmas, I got a pack of fire crackers. But by the next Christmas, daddy was back on his feet and we had a new car sitting out in front of our house, I got a BB gun and I had a wagon under the tree and it full of presents. Even when we were real poor, though, the lack of money never took away our love or closeness in the family. I guess we were so dependent on each other.

"Daddy used to haul whiskey to the Al Capone gang down in Miami and they would hide the whiskey in the elevator shafts of their hotels. I remember daddy saying he could drive right on in and unload his whiskey, sorta like a basement. And when he got well after the kidney operation, he started in the whiskey business in a big way again. He hauled to the Queen of the Bootleggers, a lady named Sue Cause, in Miami. She shot a revenuer right between the eyes and the bullet somehow went around his skull and came out the back of his head. He lived, but she had to go to prison. The day she got out of prison, she came to our house. We knew she was coming and we were all dressed a little nicer than usual. I must have been about 10 or 12 years old, but I remember we were all excited. It was just like the movies. They drove up in this big LaSalle car. She got out with these two guys who had pin–striped double–breasted suits on. I'll never forget one of 'em had two teeth out and his hair was slicked back. They got out and she came in here and sat down. Daddy called me and said, 'Come here, son, I want you to meet Sue Cause. She's Queen of the Bootleggers.'

"I was impressed and I thought that was an honor to have her sittin' there. She said, 'Yeah, I heard you had a boy,' and she gave me a present that the prisoners had made over there. She gave us a copy of Look Magazine that had her picture on the front cover. It said, 'Sue Cause, Queen of the Bootleggers.' I remember they sat around and talked about the future of the whiskey business, who was still in it and who wasn't. I was taking it all in. They talked about who to trust and who not to trust. It was just like a business meeting of the county commissioners discussing paving a road. I remembered feeling so honored that she had come to our house. I've never forgotten that day, or Sue Cause.

"Daddy hid whiskey in our attic. The outside vent was too small to get a five–gallon jug through, so he had a larger vent made

and we would put it up there at night. Daddy would age some of the whiskey and that brought more money. We had a concealed place in our bedroom closet where we could hide five five-gallon jugs broken down into pints, half-pints, etc. We could just lift the floor up and place it in this hollow place. The revenuers use to come in and look through the closets, and the floor would be just full of shoes and they never found it. It's been nailed down and boarded up now.

"Daddy had whiskey buried all around the place and I remember one time, daddy had some liquor buried not far from our house. The woods caught on fire, right about where Fraser Hospital is now. The fire chief was Teddy Bear Yarbrough and he came rolling up there in his fire truck and daddy yelled at him to put the fire out over his whiskey first, so Teddy Bear did. Everyone around there was helping to tote daddy's whiskey back across the road. I remember the sheriff's car was coming and somebody yelled to run stop them until we could save all daddy's whiskey. And they did.

"Daddy had some people working for him selling whiskey. One time one of them got caught, and daddy helped take care of that family.

"I remember people took you at your word back then. They trusted you. People brought daddy and mama money up here for whiskey bills and they never counted the money. I can never remember them doing that. I'd go with daddy to buy a load, but mostly we made most of our own at our own stills. Daddy always had a still, and what made our whiskey good clean whiskey was the clean copper stills and good wooden barrels daddy used. He always hired someone to make the whiskey for him.

"Grandpa Davis built the first telephone company in Baker County. He lived in the first block off Main Street on North College and the telephone company was across the street from his house. He eventually gave it to some widow woman. It didn't have any air conditioning and Dorothy Byrd was the telephone operator. She would sit out on the front porch where it was cool. I remember Uncle Lloyd would be trying to get the phone and he'd go out on our front porch and holler to the next block, 'Dot, go inside and answer the phone!' Dot kept us posted when the revenuers were spotted. Someone

would call her and they'd say, 'The bull is out,' and she'd call and say, 'The bull is out' and we'd know to be careful.

"Daddy had the distinction of opening the first bar in Macclenny, and there are still bullet holes in the ceiling where they used to shoot up the place, right at the corner of 228 and Main Street. Daddy didn't drink. I used to see him taste it to see if it was good whiskey. I was in college when I drank my first drink.

"I remember one time one of my friends came up here to the house to buy some whiskey, and daddy asked him if he was old enough. I reckon he was trying to do a little right.

"I remember one time when I was young and impressionable, Uncle Dickie came by and said, 'Come run down to Umatilla, Florida with me. I've got to pick up some money,' so I got in the car with him. I remember he drove fast, but you know that was the times back then and to mama and daddy that was no more to them than if I was going to get a loaf of bread. When we got there, he pulled in the woods and I'll never forget it. He pulled right off to the left of the highway and put the car in park and reached right up in an oak tree and got the dangest sack of money you've ever seen. It was $800, all in tens and twenties. I was young, so therefore it looked like an enormous amount of money to me. He just put it in the seat and we turned right around and came back.

The house is still standing today that daddy owned across the street from Knabb's Sports Complex on West Boulevard North. We stored whiskey there for several years, and I remember it was so full of whiskey we had to make trails to walk through. The same in the attic and I'm guessing we had about 50 or so five-gallon jugs stored there for further distribution.

"I remember going with daddy to the train depot in Macclenny on at least one or two occasions when he sent several five-gallon jugs of moonshine to Tallahassee. We pulled up to the east side of the platform and two African-American train conductors knew all about it because they took the shine and loaded it onto the car and it headed out to Tallahassee.

"We used to race a lot. People were always coming up here trying to get daddy to race. Tommy Moon used to fix up his cars to run fast. People would be lining 121 at Turkey Creek Bridge, where we

started, and we'd go all the way to Cute Starling's juke. Then we started racing further, because Eulie Dugger would come home with a patrol car and we'd race the patrol car. Daddy never lost a race.

"Junior Crockett and Ray Dinkins bought the Kaiser/Frazier place, and Junior came here one day and wanted to race daddy. Daddy had a Hudson Hornet. They started right there on 121 at Dr. Watson's house, and I think daddy passed them right there where Aunt Novie and Uncle Lloyd had all their cows. There was some manure in the road and the impact just threw it up on their windshield.

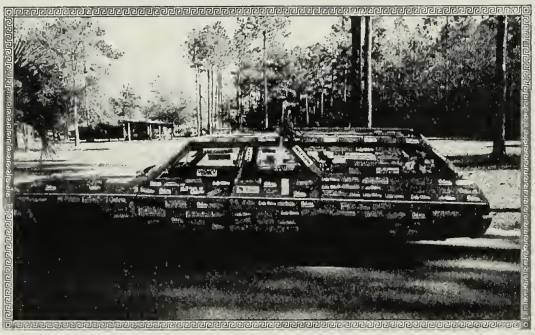
"Daddy always had a number 68 tag on his car. We wouldn't buy a 52 tag because people would know we were from Baker County and they were liable to pull you over and look for moonshine. There were only 67 counties in Florida, but we could buy a number 68, which meant office agent. Daddy got them through the mail somewhere.

"We used to race and do just about anything when Charlie Johns was governor. We would pull out our driver's license and they would say, 'You kin to Charlie?' and we'd say, 'Yeah,' and they'd say, 'Go ahead.' That happened several times.

"Daddy got to where he'd let me go for small loads of whiskey, especially if he was into a big poker game and really winning. I'd been with him so much, I knew how to do it. I could tell if it was good liquor or not. You'd shake the jug about three times and if the bubbles left the edges and went to the center, it was 100 proof. If they went up and didn't all connect, it was under a 100. I could taste it and tell if it was made in a copper still. Daddy insisted our stills be kept neat; he didn't allow any paper or old bottles around, or if you were drinking a Pepsi, you didn't just throw your bottle down, you had to put it away. We never went to the still the same way, either, in case someone was watching us.

"Daddy let me borrow his car and he knew I raced. I was caught speeding with someone over in Lake Butler on my way to a ball game, and was fined. They let me go but I was supposed to come back to pay my fine. When I got home and told daddy, he just said, 'Well, did you win the race?' and I said, 'Yes, sir,' and he said, "Well, go pay the fine.' One time, Daddy had a new '53 Olds and I'd drive it

uptown and loan it to my first cousin, Maurice Prevatt, to take his date out and I'd just walk around hunting me a way to ride around. Maurice was older and I looked up to him and some of the others like him that played football.



**A gator fan is in this vehicle - 352 University of Florida Gator Stickers identify Tommy Johns as he drives around Baker County**

"I totaled two cars and one had to take two wreckers to bring the pieces in. It was strung up and down 90. I was driving and Bobby Thomas, who was in the back seat, said, 'How fast are we going?' and George Taylor said, 'You can't see the speedometer.' About that time the right front tire blowed out and we started rolling over. It took the hair off Zade Cowart's head and required 23 stitches. John Porterfield and Steve Johns and the others were slung out all through them woods. George's eye stayed black and blue for almost a year. We didn't have any sense of fear back then. It's a wonder we lived because such as that went on all the time.

"Fortunately, I had one experience that was very positive for me. Things could get pretty hectic around our house at report card time, so one day, Lonnie Dugger, who was my high school principal, caught me signing my own report card because it wasn't a very good one to take home for daddy to sign. He said he wanted to see me in his office, so I went in there and noticed my report card on his desk. I didn't realize it until then just how much interest Lonnie Dugger had in me, and I'm sure all the other students. From then on, I made good grades in my junior and senior year, and I made sure daddy signed. If I made anything lower than a 'C', I'd have to come in after school to study and make it up, and he would be the one that would stay after school with me. That was a blessing that I got caught because that really helped me. My brother, George Wray, had the knowledge of just how important an education was and he was always on me to study. And mama and daddy stressed education and would always say to

me, 'Can't you see the strain we're under, don't do what we're doing.' I guess I couldn't because we had all them big card games and I saw all those sacks of money and it was influencing.

"Eventually, Daddy wanted to get out of the whiskey business. The law was closing in and searching with airplanes. Radios had come out in the police cars. He knew it was time to get out and when we got out, we got out altogether.

Daddy built a truck stop on north 121 in 1956 across the street from Uncle Dickie's house. It was open 24 hours a day. He was under such a strain and I could tell it because he thought the internal revenue was going to come around and say, 'Where did you get the money to build this?' Daddy would have the money, but he'd have to go to the bank and borrow the money, and then pay the bank back. I can remember that after a couple of years, after no one came around asking questions, we started breathing easier and thinking, 'Well, we're going to get by, we've made it.' I remember when we got the ice machine, the guy brought it out here and daddy said, 'I want to pay you cash, but I'm just scared.'

"Almost everyone gathered at the truck stop to eat, just like they did at our house to play cards. One time, my little brother, Jimmy, walked up to one of the most influential men in Macclenny, Billy Knabb, who was eating lunch there with some friends. Jimmy knew him when he used to come to our house to play cards. Right in front of everyone, Jimmy said, 'Hi, Mr. Knabb. Ya'll getting up a little game?' That man still gets a laugh out of that today.



**Tommy Johns**
**U.S. Airforce 1950s**

"Daddy sold the truck stop after 12 years. Then he went to work as a jailer at the jail and mama their cook/dietician. They retired 10 years after that."

Tommy went off to college with his best friend, Pee Wee Brinson, in

1956. He was 25 years old when he married Jacquelyn 'Jackie' Colley from Starke. Their 16–year marriage produced two children, Tommy Gerald Johns II and Leslie Jacquelyn Johns. Three years ago, he married Janie Echols.

An avid sports fan, his home is decorated from front–to–back with Florida Gator souvenirs. The station wagon he proudly drives has more than 352 Florida University Gator stickers plastered over the entire body of the vehicle and a sign that says, 'A Gator Fan is in this Vehicle.'

Would he change his life in any way, if he could live it over?

"You know if I could live my life over, I'd want my mama and daddy to have a job like everybody else, because it was a strain, if you get down to it, the bottom line. They were as good a mama and daddy as you could get. They loved me, and I certainly loved them, but it was a hard life on all of us due to the constant strain."

After the death of Kathryn Johns in 1985, Clarence began attending church with his sister, Novie. She was a member of "The Lord's Church" in Taylor, whose pastor is former sheriff Ed Yarbrough. In 1986, Clarence's health failed. As he lay in a coma in a Jacksonville hospital, his grieving family decided to phone Reverend Yarbrough to come. The former sheriff– turned–preacher, did. And this is how he remembers the incident.

"Clarence started coming to church with his sister, Novie, after his wife died. He was just as nice and kind as he could be. After he became ill and hospitalized, the family asked me if I'd visit him. So after church one Sunday afternoon, my wife Faye and I went and joined his family at his bedside. It was evident that the family expected him to die from his condition because he had been in a coma for so long. When I went in, we gathered and had a prayer for him, and Clarence opened his eyes. I said, 'Brother Clarence, do you know who this is?' and he kinda smiled and said, 'Yeah, Sheriff, you didn't come to put me in jail did you?'

"Well, after he said that I knew he was coherent, so we started talking about the Lord. I asked him some questions like, 'Do you believe in the Lord?' And he said he did. I then said, 'Brother Clarence, would you like to join the church?' and he said, ''Yeah, I would.' So then I went through the same questions we ask when one comes

down to the altar, such as if they believe Christ is the true Son of God, and born of the Virgin Mary. He said 'Yes' to all of them. So I began to look around for something to baptize him since he'd made his confession of faith. I got a little pan of water and a wash cloth and everyone gathered around his bed and in the room. I couldn't baptize him the traditional way that we believe in doing, because we couldn't take him up out of his sick bed, so all we could do was go through a formality. So I dipped the cloth in the clean water and squeezed it on his head and wiped it off with the towel, and said the words,' I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.'

"Everyone was just amazed, they could hardly believe it. I'd never known Clarence to be in any church much -- he may have gone and I never knew about it -- and so after all these years to have him come to me, after I wasn't sheriff any longer, and he wasn't a bootlegger any longer, and say that he wanted to join our church, it was a wonder."

Tommy Johns agrees.

"You could feel the Spirit of the Lord there, and right after that daddy went back in the coma. We moved him to a nursing home and he died almost two days to the year after mama."

Ed Yarbrough preached his funeral, and then Clarence Johns was laid to rest beside his wife in Woodlawn Cemetery. One of the most vibrant sagas and two of the most colorful characters of its era were gone.

In the past 17 years, Tommy has had three cardiac arrests, two heart attacks, and two "balloons." He's been in the hospital more than 20 times.

"The last time I was in the hospital, I knew I was at the cross roads," he said.

"On Friday, I had been out in the yard feeding my dogs when I felt something coming on. I came in and took nitroglycerin, lay down and waited on Janie to come home. We had Reverend John Chesser from the Assembly of God Church come over and pray for me, and I prayed. I didn't get any better, so on Sunday we called my doctor over in Gainesville and he said to bring me on in. I told everyone that I

knew God was going to heal me or he was going to touch my doctor and he was going to do something different.

"They started working on me by the time I arrived at the hospital. They catherized me. I watched them do it, I've always been able to watch it each time they do it. Three months before they had done a balloon, and two years before that open heart surgery in Alabama. I remember watching the Super Bowl game that night and got some relief. Then the doctor came into my room and said, 'Tommy, I can't find a thing in the world wrong with you.' He told me he was going to put nuclear dye in me in the morning just to see if he had missed something. He said that would show it up. But after that he said, he still couldn't find anything wrong with me. He said, 'Go home and do what you feel like doing. I can't give you no instructions.' He said 'I know something was wrong when you got here, but now I can't find anything.'

"I remember one time they were working on me in Gainesville, and Janie was standing there crying a little bit, and one paramedic said, 'Honey, we're going to take good care of your daddy.' I raised up on the stretcher and said, 'Daddy? That's my wife.'

I had been going to church for about a year when that happened in Gainesville last year, and I told Janie the Lord had healed me and I was going to serve Him the rest of my life, and I mean serve Him. Before we got married, we were both tired of our lives; she had been single six years and I had been single six years. She had been married twice and I'd been married twice. We'd been dating six years, so we said we were going to find a marriage counselor and be counseled before we got married. She had been going to the Macclenny Assembly of God and said the minister was a marriage counselor. I asked her where she was going to church and she told me it was a Pentecostal. I said, 'What is that, a holy roller?' I told her I wanted to go to church where I could bend a little. But we went to her minister, who was John Chesser, and he has a license to be a marriage counselor. I felt comfortable right there at the Assembly of God. He wouldn't even marry us unless we went through marriage counseling.

"I was elected a deacon last week. It takes three years to be a deacon before you can even be elected, and then you can't be if you've been divorced. However, the Board wavered, and I got elected.

I've been studying the Bible. The guy that just studies it occasionally can't talk to me about the Bible because I'm getting to know it pretty good. I study almost every day, because it takes a lot of studying to finally get the whole picture. I haven't missed but twice in three years.

"I was sitting in church the other night when the Super Bowl game was going on, and you know how I love football, well it didn't bother me a bit. I went right on to church and I came home at half time and flipped it on, but it didn't bother me not to be seeing it while he was up there preaching. I mean I got it. I wanted it and it took me two years to get it like I wanted it. I mean I just stayed in the word. It used to didn't mean anything to me to hear people say, 'You got to stay in the word, you got to stay in the word,' and then it started falling in place and I began to see everything as I studied and studied. I went and I listened. I went to hear people preach. I went to hear Rodney Howard from South Africa, and other people from all walks of life. I'm just analyzing and absorbing. I'd say, 'Lord, I want it, Lord, I want it. You saved me, but I want that anointing power, I want the Holy Ghost. I believe in it, and I want it.' So I worked for it and I got it just about ten minutes after four a.m. early Saturday morning after the Super Bowl game last year ( January, 1994). I had gotten up and gone to the bathroom. I felt I had been awakened up for something, but I lay back down and pulled that cover up and got comfortable, and buddy, it was Bamm!. I come out of that bed and it was just like you had turned on a light and grabbed me out of bed from a deep sleep. It wasn't put on, I wasn't dreaming, but when I come out of that bed, I was a saved Christian person. I told them at church, and this is just me talking, but it's how I feel. You know you are saved when you are not afraid of dying. I said, 'If you're afraid of dying, then you're not saved. Now, that's just the way I feel personally about it. I have another saying I've come up with I like, and that is, 'Death couldn't conquer Him, and the grave couldn't hold Him.' That's just what suits me!

"I've had this house anointed. I got the preacher to come in here with oil, because I believe in all them demons and all. We used to sell liquor and gamble and all, so I got this house clean. Anytime the devil wants to come in here, I say, 'Come on in, buddy, I got a chair for you, then I tell him, 'You remember the cross?' And the Devil

says,''what about the cross?' and I say, 'He was on the cross but He is the only one who ever come back, and there have been a lot who have died, but Christ is the only one who has come back from that grave.'

"All of those times that I thought were good times, dancing and drinking that liquor, and oh, how I loved to dance, me and my wife, but all them times, I've tried to be a gentleman. One reason I think the Lord let me live is I never cussed; for some reason, I just never did. I was telling someone the other day that and how I'd cleaned up my life completely, and she made me feel good when she said, 'Well, you didn't have much to clean up.' But, I did. I went through some marriages, and if you want to lay fault I didn't show the leadership and all I should. I was drinking that liquor and beer and dancing and partying and that was it, and now it seems like a bad dream, and it seems like I never done it. Today, there is no high like getting in that church!



**Faye (Cowart) and Richard "Dickie" Davis CA1954**



**Richard "Dickie" Davis CA 1950**

# Richard H. 'Dickie' Davis

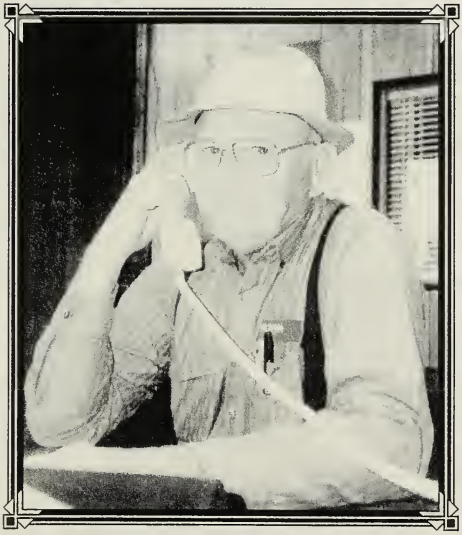
## Macclenny, Florida

*"Back then you didn't have nothing written down on paper, it was just a man's word. I knew if Junior Crockett lived, he'd pay me, but if he was laying down there at Brinkley's, he couldn't."*

*"Bootleggers had morals, and they were trustworthy people back then. They wouldn't let you curse around ladies, they'd get you if you did and call you down."*

**Faye Cowart Davis**

Hard work is nothing new to Dickie Davis. He has been doing it all of his life. In addition, he has worked for the county he proudly calls home, serving and contributing his time and resources for as long as he can remember. Those who know him best describe him as ambitious, industrious, enterprising, frugal, and always, without fail, a dedicated and fervent worker in all he undertakes to do.



**Richard "Dickie" Davis**

When this county native was growing up in Macclenny, it was a time when things were beginning to emerge from behind a dark cloud of recession. His hardworking, God–

fearing father, Richard John Davis, overcame the obstacles of destitution during the time of the Great Depression in the nation, and started, in 1931, what is today The R.H. Davis Oil Company.

"Daddy and I used to get up about 4 a.m. and go down to open the station in downtown Macclenny, and while daddy went to Jacksonville for a load of fuel, I pumped gas and ran the station until he got back, then I'd go to school," he said. "Daddy never knew anything but hard work, and he taught me the value of it for as long as I can remember."

During his high school years, Dickie excelled in sports. The first football team was organized in 1945 and the following year, he joined the squad. His most ardent supporter was his mother, Carrie, who faithfully attended all of his basketball and football games. He was among the most popular in the close knit group of students of Macclenny–Glen High School and even today maintains close personal friendships with most of them.

Following graduation in 1950, he married his high school sweetheart and class beauty, Virginia Ware.

"I took a job working for Walter Denison and Son in Jacksonville making 75 cents an hour," he said. " Mr. C.K. Tharpe was general manager."

Davis said it was a coincidence that he got started hauling moonshine.

"I used to stay at the home of my sister, Kathryn, and brother–in–law, Clarence Johns, a lot. It was on one of these occasions that a man came by from Gainesville that needed someone to haul him some whiskey. I told him I'd carry him some, and it just went from there. I was making $28 a week in Jacksonville working all day long, and I'd make $150 a night hauling moonshine to the man in Gainesville. I carried him 30 jugs three times a week and would get up the next morning and go to work for 75 cents an hour. I never missed a day's work the whole time I did that, and I did it until I was drafted into the army and left for Korea," he said.

The military paid him $75 a month. In just a few days time he was promoted from a private to a sergeant. "I spent my 21st birthday on a ship going overseas and my 22nd one coming home," he said.

When Dickie returned from Korea, his marriage was over. "I didn't have fifteen cents to my name when I got home," he said. "But I had a beautiful daughter, Renee'."

"When I was discharged on April 21, 1953, I borrowed the money from my sister Kathryn to buy me a 1952 Cadillac and hauled enough moonshine to pay her paid back in three weeks," he said.

Davis took a job with his father driving a fuel truck for $45 a week. But that was not nearly enough money to live on, so by day he drove the fuel truck down Baker County's dusty, unpaved roads, hauling kerosene and gas in a small delivery truck like his father. At night, he rumbled down Baker County's backroads and Florida's by-ways in his souped-up Cadillac and other fast cars, hauling moonshine. Besides hauling whiskey, he seized the opportunity to haul and sell sugar to the local moonshiners. It was a chance to get ahead of the low-paying, low-scale jobs in the '50's... that is, if you could even find one. It had long been a way of life in Baker County as a means of supplementing family incomes and at that time few people thought anything about it.

Dickie said he rarely slept during those days. "Eventually, I was able to financially back some moonshine stills and owned half-interest in them. I hauled a load almost every night, and hired people to haul for me, as well," he said.

"The only reason I messed with sugar was to trade it for shine and double my profit. The moonshiners would come and get 30-40 sacks of sugar from me and they would owe me, in exchange, 30-40 jugs of whiskey. I was hauling whiskey to Tampa where I had connections to get sugar right off the ship. Sometimes I'd go almost a week at a time and not hardly sleep."

Hauling sugar and moonshine by night, and faithful to never miss a day's work kept him busy, but he had time to meet a 1952 graduate from Macclenny High School, Taylor native Faye Cowart.

"Faye was working up at Odom's Department Store in Macclenny. We met sometime the summer after I got home from Korea and we married January 28, the next year," he said.

The couple moved into a small apartment in Macclenny. "When Faye and I got married, I was doing very well. I had half interest in

seven stills, and a week later I didn't have the first one. They tore them all up that week," he said.

"After we got married, I really didn't want him hauling himself, so he hired somebody else to haul for him most of the time," said Faye.

The couple remembers some harrowing as well as humorous experiences. "I didn't get involved or have anything to do with it," said Faye, "but once I had to go over and get him out of jail," she said.

"Dickie was arrested while speeding and running from the law," she explained. "They had blocked the road at the Ellerby curve so they got Dickie and took him to jail in Lake Butler. He was charged $500 and given 30 days in jail.

"I was expecting our first baby any day, so I went over there. I had the money, but they would not let him out. I remembered that I had met a judge from there who had attended some parties in Baker County, so I asked if he was in, and they told me he was. So I went in his office, and I said, 'Judge I've got a problem,' and he looked at me and saw I was pregnant, but he recognized me, and he listened to me tell him about Dickie. I said, 'My husband got put in jail last night, and you charged him a $500 fine, and gave him 30 days.' I told him I didn't mind paying the $500 but I couldn't stand him in jail for 30 days,' so he said to a man standing there, 'Go let Mr. Davis out.'"

"I'm sure I would have been kept there the 30 days had Faye not gone over there and talked to that Judge," he said.

Dickie said while most of the moonshiners in Baker County took their hauls through Baxter and were always being chased by the law, he went SR 90 through Lake City and seldom had the same problems.

The couple lived conservatively and stashed away cash money, never using a bank. "I used Mama's pocket book," said Dickie. "She never touched a penny of it, and many times she went to church with that old pocketbook full of money.

"One time, we lived in that little old apartment up town and I won't ever forget it. I was walking the floor one night. It was pretty late and Faye got up and said, 'What in the world is wrong with you,' and I said, 'Junior Crockett is up there in Georgia right now, somewhere,

running a hundred miles an hour and he owes me about $12,000. If he gets killed up there, I'll never get a nickel of it.

"I had let some boys have about four or five truck loads of sugar and Junior was standing good for it," he explained.

"It was just a few nights later that Junior knocked on the door and came in and sat a whole sack of money up there on the table and said, 'Get out what I owe you.' He just sat there and slept while I counted it, and I put the rest of it back in the sack and he got up and left.

"Back then you didn't have nothing written down on paper, it was just a man's word. I knew if Junior Crockett lived, he'd pay me, but if he was laying down there at Brinkley's, he couldn't."

"Bootleggers had morals, and they were trustworthy people back then," said Faye. "They wouldn't let you curse around ladies; they'd get you if you did and call you down."

The Davis couple especially remember Junior Crockett, one of the most prosperous of the Baker County moonshiners. "I want to tell you something about Junior Crockett," said Dickie. " He was always honest with people. If Junior told you something, he would do it. Junior Crockett helped a lot of people in this county. Everybody always wants to talk about the bad things and seldom say anything about the good, but Crockett helped many an old farmer and people out there in these woods. No telling what people owed him at the drug store. His daddy delivered me into the world, and he was the same way. If you called him he would come, if you had money or didn't have it. He was a fine man, too.

"I always kept my dealings pretty quiet," said Dickie. "And I never worked for anyone but myself. I'd buy sugar in Jacksonville, 120 sacks at a time and bring it out here on a truck. It was only $8.25 for a 100–pound sack. I even hauled it off the docks when it arrived from Cuba, bringing back 250 sacks at a time from Tampa. If I traded for moonshine, I could make more money, often doubling it if I hauled it to Miami or Tampa. Most of the moonshine I hauled from Baker County went into counties that were dry, up in Georgia."

Once he purchased a police car. "I bought the car that Deputy Charney Rhoden drove, a 1940 Ford with a Lincoln engine. It had a siren and all on it," he said.

Fast cars, out–running the law, initiating fast car races, 'out foxing' the authorities was life in the fast lane, and Dickie Davis had a part in all of it. His stories are endless and even as candid and frank as he normally is, he steadfastly refuses to relate some of them.

"In the first place, you wouldn't believe them, and in the next place, I wouldn't want them printed," he said.

The Davis's memories of those days are very vivid, and their strong ties to those who were involved are manifest as they relate story after story that lingers from that era of time.

"I remember something about Catfish Stokes I'll never forget and it always brings a chuckle," he said, talking about the man who, at one time, constructed most of the moonshine stills in the county. "One night, me and him were up there in Lake City. We went to see someone about some whiskey and when I picked him up to go with me, he just happened to be barefooted (which was pretty natural for Catfish), and had his britches' legs rolled up. We were out in the woods about half way to the man's house when our old car blowed up, so we decided to walk back to Lake City and call someone in Macclenny to come get us. It was pouring down rain. We were walking down this old road, soaking wet, and Catfish said, 'Now here I am out here, barefooted, and I got enough money in my pockets right now to burn a wet mule.' I think he had about three or four thousand dollars crammed in his pockets that day," Dickie laughed.

In 1959 something happened that changed the Davis's life. "I came home one day and told Faye I was quitting. I said, 'I'm selling all my cars and equipment,' and the reason I did was because I saw that the people were getting down on it. People were telling on their neighbors and things were beginning to change. Our son, Ricky, was growing up and we had a new baby daughter, Dana. I told Faye, 'Things are beginning to change and I'm going to change with it. I don't want my kids to grow up in nothing like this.' So I quit....just like that!"

Contrary to what many people conceive as moonshine days of money rolling in by the barrels, Davis said it was not true.

"Back in the' 50's, any amount of money was a lot, because there just wasn't much money around any place. The average salary

was $30 a week. What little people made, it took every penny to live if you had a car or a piece of land somewhere. Moonshine supplemented what little you could make at a regular job, and the money was used for necessities. About the time a moonshiner got a little money, his still was torn up or his car confiscated. You'd have to start over. But it was a job, and it paid better than other jobs that were available in those days. It was hard work, too. There was nothing easy about it."

After Davis gave up any activities connected with the moonshine industry, he continued to work with his father in the fuel oil business.

"It wasn't long after that when daddy came over to the house one day and he said, 'Son, I'm retiring. I'm going to start drawing my social security and I want to sell out to you.' I said, 'How much do you want?', and he told me. I went into the back room, got the money and handed it to him right then. I was also in the pulp wood business with a man named Roy Snow and I was making good money doing that. Snow ran it, and I helped him some. I had bought the pulp wood trucks and he did the business end."

Although Davis admits that hauling moonshine may have helped him get a jump on life financially, it was the consistent hard work, and shrewd handling of his combined incomes that gave him the real start.

"I never missed a day's work from my other jobs," he mused. "Even when I was making seventy–five cents an hour by day, and $150 by night. I worked steady for daddy by day and for myself in moonshine by night. I've always been frugal with my money."

Today, the R.H. Davis Oil Company, boasts of six trucks and eight modern Exxon stations. It is still a father–and–son operation although his father died in 1969. Today, Dickie's son, Ricky, is affiliated with the company which is located on 121 north of Macclenny. In addition, the business has now expanded to a fourth generation Davis. Richard's great grandson, Max, who is Ricky's son, will help carry on the business legacy when he graduates from college.

LP gas was added to the business in June 1983, and more than 50 employees staff the office, service and delivery departments.

Before his death, Richard J. Davis was an active member of the Primitive Baptist Church where he served as a deacon. Among the many things he did for the community was helping to build the present day Macclenny Primitive Baptist Church. He served for six years as a Baker County School Board member. He assisted the needs of the school system during times when it was left up to the parents and citizens if activities, such as a football team, were organized for the youth. If it was a program to back the youth, or community, Richard Davis' name was always on the list of supporters and contributors.

Like his father, Dickie contributes his services to the community in many varied ways. His company is continually asked for support and contributions, and for years they have sponsored sports groups such as Little League. The many civic interests he has supported have been varied. In minutes after hearing about the project SOS (Save Our Station) and the need for a place to move the historic Macclenny railroad depot, he came up with the suggestion for the present–day location which evolved into the Baker County Historical Park. He enthusiastically and financially supported and served on the first Baker County–Wide Homecoming Committee. He served on the Board of County Commissioners for 12 years, and on the Baker County Development Commission for four years.

"Serving on the Development Commission is what compelled me to run for county commissioner because I saw so many things that we were missing in the county on enhancement money that the federal government was giving away," he said. "We had never got a federal grant until I got on the board and, when I did, I went after them. We built the Social Services Building down there and the Senior Citizen's Building and part of the jail. We built the Fire Department, Bertha Wolfe Health Department Building, and the Agriculture Building. We built that with federal money, we didn't have any tax money in that, we got it with grants. Baker County never had a grant until I went on the Board of County Commissioners.

"I got a federal grant to bring the water and sewer plant to the Development Commission property on 121 South before we got Westinghouse. Me and Inez Burnsed were at a meeting in the Mayor's office in Jacksonville and a guy from Washington was there. That was

back when Carter was president and he was giving all this money away on water and sewers. I told him that our county wasn't in the water and sewer business, but the city was, and the Development Commission had property for it. I told him we could have it ready if we should land any kind of industry if we qualified. I asked him if we could get money for that and he said, 'yes,' and said he'd send me the papers.

"At the same time, I asked him about Glen St. Mary, and he said, 'yes,' and he'd send me the packet on that for them. I filled out our papers and sent them in. Then I went over and gave the papers he'd sent me for Glen to Mr. Phillip Taylor. I told him the money was available if he would fill the papers out and send them back in. I went back a week later and Mr. Taylor told me he and the commissioners had talked about it, and they had decided they didn't want to mess with the federal government. So they never did send in the papers and they could have got water and sewer for Glen free. But it's everybody to his own thing I guess, but if the government is going to give the money away and you're not going to get it for your county then you are going to be behind times.

"I got every nickel I could for the county. If it came out, I put in for it. Some I missed, but some I didn't. The whole time I served on the county commission, I never charged the county with a phone call, never charged them with a hotel bill or motel bill or any kind of travelling expense. I always paid for that myself wherever I went. I used to go over to the State Road Department yard in Lake City and the salvage yards in Starke and buy equipment for the county for practically nothing. I bought a 10–wheeler dump truck for the county over there for $1,800, with brand new tires on it, about a $60,000 truck. So a lot of money can be saved," he said.

Still up early each morning and to bed late at night, he continues to work tirelessly. In the last few years he has been taking more time off to travel with Faye in their motor home. Sometimes they are accompanied by close friends, and family. Together they trail across the country hunting, fishing, attending country shows and seeing the countryside. Since he no longer holds down positions of government he is free to relax and get–away more.

"My daddy always told me if I'd tend to my business, I'd stay about two weeks behind because I wouldn't have time to spend on other people's business, and he was right," said the resourceful man, who still believes in hard work and frugality.

His parents were a great influence on his life, and he still remembers back to those days when they were a big part of his daily life.

"Daddy and Mama didn't approve of moonshine, but back then when I did it, it was just a way of life, and they just accepted it. In the beginning, it was either do that or starve to death. After all, seventy-five cents an hour, or $28 a week, which ever way you want to look at it, didn't take care of the bills, even in 1950.

"Daddy never owned property. All he did was haul the gas from Jacksonville and sell it. He didn't have a piece of property or anything when I bought him out except for two trucks.

"I've often wished that daddy could come back and see what all has happened to the company that he started in 1931," said Dickie. "When I had that cancer operation 18 months ago, and I came home from the hospital, Faye moved one of our adjustable beds down here to the family room for me to sleep in. I woke up about 2 o'clock in the morning and daddy was standing right there," he said, pointing to a near-by spot. "Now I'm just as wide awake as I was then, and we exchanged words. I said, 'What are you doing here?', and he said, 'I've come to see about you.' That's all he said, I remember his exact words."

Today, as he carries on the family traditions and business of his father, he knows that the price for legacy is worth more than all the wealth in the world. And he is passing it on to his son, and grandsons that follow, for generations to come.

# Carl Henry Rewis

## Baker County, Florida

*"All the money you could stack in 40 acres, a hundred feet high, wouldn't pay me to go back and do what I done in moonshine."*

**Carl Rewis**

*"There was deep underbrush, and I didn't take time to think about a snake being in there, I just started crawling."*

**Carl Rewis**

*"Wallace never gave me a salary, or paid me a rate for hauling whiskey or making it. When I needed money for groceries, or clothes, or things like insurance, I'd go to him and tell him, and he'd give me twenty–five dollars or whatever I needed."*

**Carl Rewis**

North, East, South and West –– Carl Rewis lived a nomadic life in every section of Baker County during his formative years. Like many other children born in Baker County around the turn of the century, his parents were poor, but honest and proud tenant farmers. His birth in Manning, south of Macclenny, on September 28, 1923, was the first arrival of 12 children born to Harry and Ella Wilkerson Rewis who had married on January 6 of that year.



**Beulah and Carl Rewis**

By the time he was a month old, he was living

south of Sanderson where he became ill. Dr. Edward Crockett, the county physician was summoned.

"I only have one shot with me, Mrs. Rewis," the doctor told Carl's young mother. "And I can't waste it on your child, he's not going to live, and I must give it to a child whose life I can save."

"If you don't give that shot to my child, I'll hit you over the head with the frying pan, doctor," Ella Rewis retorted.

Her threat was taken seriously, and Dr. Crockett gave the sick little boy a shot in the rump. Within two hours he rallied, and miraculously lived. "Had it not been for Dr. Crockett giving me that shot, I'd be dead," he said.

"We moved around a lot. And I think Mama had a baby every time we moved.

"We had an old Model T Ford and somehow daddy would pile it high with all our stuff. He'd take the headboards and make railings on top of the car, then he would stack our wood stove, moss mattresses and chairs, tables and stuff like that all on top of one another. We always had two or three cats, and three or four dogs, and when daddy would get everything loaded, he'd pile us younguns on top of all our belongings and start throwing the cats and dogs up on top, too. We would look like a freight train coming down the road piled up so high. They had dirt roads back then and daddy would have to ease in that rut 'cause the car would feel like it was going to turn over, it was so top heavy."

Besides Carl, the couple's other children were: Ida, Wash Daniel, Verna Belle, Betty Jean, Nathaniel, Barbara, John and Lizzie (twins, born on Christmas day), Dolores, Ronald and Melvin.

"We didn't have plenty to eat, but we had enough," he said. "We'd have home– made grits, smoked bacon , greens and potatoes. We were sure of that 'cause we raised it. Back then, there was a lot of field goats and you could get a great big one for fifty cents. Daddy would buy one and he'd castrate the Billy, they called it a ram, and bring him home, hang him up by his heels, cut his head off, and let him bleed. Then he'd skin him, and throw the hide away so the meat wouldn't smell like a goat. And that was some real good eatin'.

"We made our pillows and mattresses from moss we pulled from the trees. We'd pick all the sticks out of it and Mama would boil it

in a big wash pot to kill the red bugs. Then we'd hang it out on the line to dry before we used it.

"I remember my grandma had some geese and she had a feather barrel where she collected feathers she'd use once a year. Someone put an old gopher in the feather barrel once and forgot him. The next year when grandma took out the feathers the gopher was still alive, but when they let him out he went straight for some gourd vines and ate himself to death.

"We could talk mama out of whipping us, but if daddy told you he was going to, he did it. We knew we better not tell daddy a lie because he would put the razor strap on your butt. I used to think he whipped me too much, but now that I'm grown, I can see where I needed the whipping. Daddy didn't believe in telling a lie, or picking up anything that didn't belong to you, and he taught us that.

"Daddy cut logs, worked in pulp wood, dug stumps, farmed, and done just about any thing he could do to find work back then. There just wasn't many jobs around. When I got big enough, about ten years old, me and him sawed pulp wood and that's the reason I didn't get to go to school. And to this day, I've always said if I was to do something bad enough that I'd have to be sent to Raiford and they gave me a job where I'd have to use a cross-cut saw, then they could put me in the electric chair because I wouldn't do it again."

As time progressed, his father, Harry, took a job in Jacksonville at the shipyards. At the age of 42 he was able to save up $700 and purchase 25 acres of prime land in north Macclenny where he lived until he died in 1980, a year following his wife's death. About the same time, seventeen-year-old Carl obtained employment at a chicken farm at Brandy Branch for $12 a week.

"Mama always had 50-100 chickens around and I loved to eat the raw eggs. I've eat a truck load of 'em. I remember she put a strap on me one time for eating the eggs and putting the hull back into the nest. She didn't care for me eating the eggs, but she'd say, 'Throw away the hull.' I'd just punch me a little hole in it and suck the egg right out of the shell. But after I went to work at that chicken farm and some of the eggs would bust and flies and kyats were all over the nest, I ain't never liked an egg since. I hardly ever eat one now."

When Carl was drafted in the military, he reported to Camp Blanding. They turned him down for military service because his right eye had a blind spot. He returned the second time, and was rejected again. While waiting on a bus to return home, a navy recruiter appeared and asked him if the army had turned him down.

"Yes, sir, they did", he said.

"Well, how would you like to be in the Navy?"

"Well, I'd like it," he said.

So the naval recruiting officer took him back through the examination line, but when they approached the eye examination station, the officer pulled him out of line and took him directly to a section where he was accepted.

"The first letter I ever wrote anybody was when I was in the Navy. I could read a little bit, and I knowed my name when I seen it, but that was about all. Mama wrote my company commander complaining that I hadn't written home, so he called me in. He told me if I didn't have my mama a letter off in the mail in a couple hours, he would give me KP duty and make me wash dishes. So a friend I'd met showed me how to start it and finish it.

"Two months later, mama wrote another letter and told them they needed to check my eyes. They did, and gave me a discharge."

Out of the Navy, he moved to Mulberry and worked on the railroad with his uncle for a year. Then he moved back to Macclenny. Without car, money, or employment, he moved back in with his parents. Then, two big changes came into his life. First, he married Margaret Johnson, and second, he accepted a job with Wallace Dupree, making and hauling moonshine.

"My daddy had made a little moonshine whiskey after he quit drinking it," Carl said. "He made it in a little branch near the house about a year or two. But I didn't get involved until I got out of the Navy. It was quick money."

Quick money, however, meant only getting paid for the necessities he needed for his family.

"Wallace never gave me a salary, or paid me a rate for hauling or making it. When I needed money for groceries, clothes, or insur-

ance, I'd go to him and tell him, and he'd give me twenty–five dollars or whatever I needed," he said.

As the years passed, Carl and Margaret had five children –– David, Carla, Cathy, Harvey and Patty.

"My children never got involved in the whiskey business. They knew what I was doing, but not to what extent. I'd do it after they went to bed and was done by the time they got up in the morning."

There are many stories of revenuers, raids, hauls, and 'stilling,' and he's willing to talk about a few of them. "I had to run a couple of times," he said, talking about the revenuers.

"They liked to have got a hold of me when I set me up an operation at Steel Bridge on the Florida side, once. Me and L.E. Wilkinson –– we called him Swampy –– were there making whiskey and he was pumping water and sweetenin' it up. He had already done the first charge and I told him I had a feeling the revenuers were coming that day. He said, 'Oh, you worry about them revenuers too much,' but I loaded what we'd made and put it in the boat. There was a lake not far so I set it out near there in a palmetto patch and went back to the still. Before I knew it, this revenuer had his hand on my arm. I run and jumped in the river right behind Swampy. He lost his britches when he jumped in. I had on a pair of khaki pants and a khaki shirt so I couldn't swim as fast as Swampy. I heard the revenuers shoot the lock off the boat and they came looking for us, riding up and down the river, but I managed to hide in the bushes and finally got away. Later on, I went back and got the whiskey I'd hid.

"I left Macclenny one night with a full load of about 275 jugs of whiskey and, just this side of Phoenix City, Alabama, the law jumped me and tried to stop me. I tried to turn the truck over, thought maybe it would catch on fire and burn the evidence, but it didn't, so I just jumped out and run. There were three or four officers and four dogs after me. I made a circle and went through a peanut field, then into a corn field and finally found this big drainage ditch.

"I started walking it thinking if I could find a pipe to crawl in I could stop up the end and keep the dogs out. I saw one man on one bank and another man on the other bank and they started shooting at

me. I bent over to make them think they'd hit me and they quit shooting. I kept running in the ditch and it kept getting deeper and deeper and direckly I got to noticing that the bank was way up there. I thought, 'I got to get out of this place,' but I could still hear them dogs a comin'.

"I found a tree that had growed upside of the ditch so I jumped up on a low branch and cooned that thing up to the bank. There was deep underbrush and I didn't take time to think about a snake being in there, I just started crawling. By this time it was dark and you couldn't even see your hand before your face. I was trying to feel my way, didn't have no idea where I was, and the swamp started gettin' real thick. Direckly, I was in water and it got deeper and deeper, I had to start swimming and I swam until I gave out. Then I lay flat of my back and rested, then I swam some more. It was a lake and I don't know how big it was, or how many gators it had because it was so dark. I couldn't see my hand before my face. I finally decided to try and stand up to see how deep it was, and discovered I could barely touch bottom, so I started walking then to the shore. Direckly, I came to a big old tree, I could only feel it, I couldn't see it. It had low branches and limbs on it, so I clumb up and got up as high as I could go. I'd hang on to the limb and try to sleep, cold and wet, and I'd near 'bout fall out. I was sitting where I could hold on, but I'd hear all kinds of things out there making sounds. It'd be such things like coons and opossums but it would sound like an elephant had stepped on something, it would just go 'pop pop.'

"Near morning, I could hear these big diesels and I knew they had to be going down a road somewhere nearby. As soon as daylight come, I crawled down out of the tree and went toward that racket and found the road. I got me a lightered knot and put it out on the edge of the highway so Wallace could find my sign because I knew they'd be looking for me. Then I hid on a high bank to wait for him.

"At 11 a.m., he and Tuffy (Junior Crockett) came riding by in a 1940 Mercury and saw it. When they stopped, I slid down that embankment so fast I almost broke my leg. The Mercury belonged to the man I was delivering the whiskey to, so we had to go back for Wallace's car. I told them if the law was to jump us, to slow up and let me out 'cause I've run all this far and I don't want to get caught now. They said, 'No, and we don't want you to get caught because it would

be five years and a ten thousand dollar fine for anyone caught with two or more gallons, and you was hauling more than that.' So, after we got Wallace's car, I lay down on the back seat all the way back to Macclenny. I told Wallace that I was quittin'. But I didn't because he talked me into it again.

"One time, I was over around Lake City with a truck loaded with about 50 five– gallon jugs. I knew they had sent two men over there, one of them a football player from some college who had gone to work for the revenue department. I'd heard that he said, 'I'll catch them blankedy blank people from up there around Baker County that's been out running all them revenues.' I had told somebody I'd like to take him out somewhere and see if I could out–run 'em, you know. Well, it was about eight o'clock in the morning when he spotted me and pulled up beside me in his car, so I had my chance. I just slid over and jumped out of the truck and started running down the road with him after me. I couldn't get far enough ahead of him like I wanted to, so I just turned and went out through the woods. I got to jumping them palmetto patches and gallberry patches. I had on a pair of them slip on shoes and they slung off. I found one and stuck it in my pocket, but lost the other one. Well, when he couldn't keep up with me, it made him mad and he started shootin'. The bark flew off and hit me on the face, it was that close, but I got away.

"After awhile, I heard an airplane coming. They could spot a piss–ant crawling down there, and they could easily see me running, so I said, 'I got to do something.' So, when they passed over me, I crawled up in a palmetto patch and when he came back he didn't see me. He went on a little further and I'd run to another palmetto patch. I just kept doing that until I got fer enough they didn't know where I was at. I finally got all the way back to Olustee, where they had a sawmill and some men were working. I saw a man gassin' up his car and when he went in to pay for the gas, I got in his car. When he came back out he said, 'I was just fixing to go look for you,' and I said, 'Well, you found me, now carry me home.' They had sent Shep Johns to get me.

"The next day there was a picture of that ball player revenuer holding up my one shoe and said they were wondering who the man was who lost it.

"I was doing this and scarcely making a living. I didn't even get paid for a load. I was all the time cutting Wallace's grass and doing other jobs and he'd just give me what I needed, but right there at the end, when I was going to quit, he started paying me when I took a load."

For several years Carl said he tended a large underground still for Wallace Dupree in north Macclenny.

"Wallace bought a house out north of town and built a big underground still inside the chicken yard. I moved in the house and made whiskey for him there nearly three years. The still was just a big old hole, probably about 20x30 feet, with concrete block sides and a concrete floor. There was big timbers in there to hold it up. Then, after we put the timbers on it, we put tar paper over it, and tarred it, and then we put dirt on top of that. On the northeast corner was the entrance where there were stairs leading down into the ground. To get in it we put a big piece of aluminum on the ground and set a biddies coop over it. When we wanted to go down into the still, we just set the biddies coop aside and moved back the aluminum to get down the stairs. I planted me some tater vines in the chicken yard, but they didn't make any taters. After we worked in the still all night, I'd scatter some corn around and them chicken's would come off the roost and scratch all around in and out of those tater vines, so there wouldn't be any footprints, and then they'd get right back on the roost."

Carl said he had a radio inside the underground still, but never had a television, as was rumored.

"We had electric lights, water pump and a good drainage system in it. I could run two charges a night and get out before day light. I had what they called a hog's head barrel to put the whiskey in. It must have held 100–200 gallons."

When a neighbor, Harley Thrift, was raided by the beverage agents in his near– by underground still, Carl said Wallace shut down his still.

"They (revenuers) knew it was there. Two of 'em came up there one day and one of 'em said, 'Well, you've been reported and we know you got a hole back there where you are making whiskey,' and I said, 'I got a WHAT?' And he said, 'A hole behind your house, and we want to look at it.' And I said, 'Well, me and you will just walk back

there and I'll let you look,' and he said, 'Well, I can't go back there with just me and you,' and I said, "Well, you'll have to, if you go back there,' and he said, 'Well, I got a man in my car, we can trust, ' and I said, 'You may trust him, but I don't because I don't even trust you, and if you can't go back there with just me, then we won't go.' So he said, 'Well, I'll just have to go and get a warrant.' And I told him to 'Go ahead,' but they never came back.

"Later, I found traces where they had already walked all back there and couldn't find anything. We had it hid pretty good. I had a chimney built where the still was and it was level with the top of the dirt. I put a chicken house over it, and a roost.

"The night they raided Harley's still, I was supposed to have taken him twelve bags of sugar. Harley had a young son who was present when the raid took place. He pretended he was sleepy and was going to his room to sleep, but instead of sleeping, he jumped out the window and ran to his uncle James Thrift's house. James had a phone, so he called Wallace to tell him and then came on down to my house to tell me because I didn't have a phone. Of course, we were glad we never delivered the sugar to them that night because, if we had, we would have been caught, too.

"We never did 'still' there anymore. We shut down because we knew that they knew the still was there. We moved the equipment somewhere else."

Revenuers began to show up everywhere and finally Carl said he told Wallace Dupree and Junior Crockett he was going to have to do something to disguise himself to keep from being recognized.

"Well, why don't you dye your hair and curl it?" Dupree suggested.

"Yeah, that sounds good. Do it and I'll pay for it," said Crockett.

"I forgot about that conversation," said Carl. "But one night Wallace came up to the house and he said, 'Come on Carl, we got to go somewhere.' So I got in the car and he drove me to Bernice Green's beauty shop. Junior was there. She sat me in the chair and Junior was just a laughing while she kinked me up and died my hair black. I think Junior thought it was going to be about $10 or something like that, but when he asked her how much, she said, 'That will be $35.' Well, Junior didn't laugh anymore after that."

Carl said moonshining was getting harder and ofttimes his legs would shake so bad he couldn't control them when the law enforcement came too close for comfort during his moonshine operations.

"My wife begged me to quit, and finally I did. I went to work for the Chevrolet place as a mechanic," he said.

"Just before I quit altogether, I tried to have a little still near the house to make a little extra money on the side. I set up six barrels, but never got to run it. I had to tote all the stuff across the woods about a mile on my back. I didn't figure anyone would ever find it there. I had it sweetened and was going down there one morning to check on it and noticed some tracks. That afternoon after work, I returned and found some more tracks. The same thing the next day, so I said, 'Well, I'll just forget it.'

"Later, Sheriff Ed Yarbrough borrowed his brother's truck and loaded the bedding up and took the beer and fed it to his hogs. I never messed with it after that," he said.

Carl worked as a mechanic for the Chevrolet place for 16 years. He was making $95 a week before deductions when he quit and went to work for the county where he stayed for the next 18 years.

His first wife left him and the couple divorced. For the next few years, his mother and his sisters helped him look after the children. His second marriage was to Carolyn Boone, and they had a child, Terry. That marriage ended in divorce, too.

"I had to work hard for my next wife, but it was worth it," he said. "I had seen her practically all of my life, but she was a lot younger than me. I had to wait several years before I could even get her to go out with me because she was only 14 years old when I first asked her out."

The love of his life was Beulah Mae, pretty daughter of Thomas Burton and Rosie Mae Rhoden Crews. Carl's sisters -- Dolores and Verna Belle -- had married Beulah's brothers.



**Terry Rewis**

"It took me a long time to get her to go out with me, but one day I was going to my mother's house to get her to cook some quails Ralph Sands had given me, and she went," he said.

"Yeah, but I had my niece with me," she reminded him. "When he asked to take me to a movie later, I told him I'd go if my niece could go, too," she said. "He told me he didn't care who went if I'd just go."

The couple said they had always liked each other. They married in 1963, at the home of her mother, when he was 40 and she was 19. Their first child, a daughter Karen, was born nine years later. They also have a son, Tom.



**Beulah and Carl Rewis with combined family (l to r): Karen (Jarvis) Carla (Davis), David Rewis, Harvey Rewis, Cathy (Bennett), Patty (Key) and Tom Rewis - Terry Rewis missing from photo**

The years seem long past, and some memories are even fading of the by-gone days of the moonshine era. Today, he'd rather reflect on stories his grandmother used to tell him about an era he never knew, like when his great-grandmother lived in an old log house with a clay floor.

"She said that one night something started digging outside the log cabin and pretty soon a big hairy arm was all the way inside claw-

ing away making the hole bigger. Great–grandma got the ax and chopped the hand off and she could hear him hollering as he ran off in the woods. They found out later it was a bear," he said.

Then there was another about a panther. "The panthers got on top of my great– grandma's house and they were trying to come down the clay chimney," he said. "After the family burned up their wood, they burned their chairs and furniture all night to keep a fire going so the panthers couldn't get down the fireplace and into the house. They say them panthers would eat a woman's breast off if they got to one."

"I'm going to tell you something, and it's the truth. All the money you could stack in 40 acres, a hundred feet high, wouldn't pay me to go back and do what I done in moonshine," he says with conviction. "I wouldn't...no way! I want to sleep at night when I lay down, and at that time you just couldn't, you just stayed under pressure all the time."

Today, the couple, with their teen–age son Tom, spends their happiest moments at home where they have always lived at the corner of Bob Kirkland and Louder Roads. Carl has a 'piddling shop' where he is constantly doing something. When they aren't there or visiting family, they are at the Primitive Baptist Church where their favorite pastor, the Reverend David Crawford, preaches.

"Now I really like that," Carl said with a smile on his face, "I haven't ever heard anyone else preach that pleases me like Brother David.

"But about them moonshine stories, I'd just as soon forget them, and talk about them exciting stories my grandma use to tell me about, like the panthers and the bears..!"

# The Sigers Saga

*"Sweet potatoes and opossum was a luxury to us back in them days, and I've even killed and eaten skunks. We'd try most anything. We were always looking for something to eat."*

"Ralph Sigers"

*"I can remember having three or four hundred dollars in my pocket and I actually thought I'd never need any more money in my life."*

**Willard Thrift**

*"When daddy got caught at his still and was sent to prison, we'd go visit him, and he'd cry."*

**Beverly Sigers Hall**

*"I said, 'If anyone comes by here looking for me, tell them I went that a-way, and I ran and ran so hard that I bled from my lungs."*

**Ralph Sigers**



**John and Serena (Thrift) Sigers in their north Baker County country store**

The afternoon sun casts a shadow over Ralph Sigers' lovely brick home as a gentle February breeze nips the air. Robust and tanned, his sparkling blue eyes have that glimmer of mischief to them. It's easy to see he is a man who loves to share a good laugh, and good memo-



**Willard Thrift and Marvin Sigers**

ries. His first cousin, Willard Thrift, often takes time from his 25,000–plus chicken farm to walk across Highway 121 north to visit with his cousin. Remembering events from their past often creates a sensational phenomenon, stirring electrifying, thrilling, and even astonishing stories that some might consider yarns or tales. It's here though, that the saga of the Sigers' begins and ends, and the epic history created has left a profound impact upon the annals of Baker County.

For many years, more than a mile of a lone unpaved stretch of road 121 north belonged to the Sigers and related families. They had their own grocery store, farms, aircraft, landing field, and uniquely–crafted cars. Their scope of living embodied cleverly built underground moonshine stills as well as those concealed deep in the dense underbrush along the banks of the St. Mary's River and other creeks and branches along the swampy streams in north Baker County.

The Sigers brothers, Ralph, Elzy, and Marvin, were intelligent men despite limited educations. They possessed brilliant, ingenious, and inventive minds, allowing them to create things that astounded people around them. Their ideas for the unique were limitless. They even built their own airplanes, and did so in their staked–out domain north of town.

Their father, John Sigers, ambled into Baker County from Georgia after his first wife died in childbirth. He eventually married

Serena, daughter of Baker County pioneers James (Jim), and Nancy Raulerson Thrift.

"When daddy first came down here from Georgia he made some of the first small copper stills, because back then moonshine was on a small-scale operation," said Ralph. " They were usually the two- or four-barrel types set out and used down by the creek."

"Our parents were share-croppers when we grew up, and we moved around a lot," he said, "and we didn't get much schooling."

"At one time, when daddy worked for a logging company, we lived in one of the box cars. When we first moved there, we moved into a corn crib with a dirt floor, and I remember that the hogs roaming the woods would come inside there. We thought we would be better off living in a box car, but found out we had to share it with another family. There was no running water, only a pitcher pump not too far away from the car. The box car was furnished with a wood-burning stove. Back then you felt lucky to just have a roof over your head. I never owned a pair of shoes until I was in my teens. I remember my mother used to make our shoes out of old rubber inner-tubes. She made our shirts out of feed sacks that people who had chickens would give us.

"I remember once daddy brought home an old dirty, greasy tarpaulin and mama put it in the wash pot with what they called ole lye soap back in them days. She boiled it, and beat it, and did everything she could do to get it white so she could make us some overalls from it. She could make most anything with her pedal sewing machine. We were proud of those clothes.

"There was a little log shelter out in the woods when we were growing up that was used for a Sunday School. It wasn't far from where I live now. We felt proud when we'd get on our feed sack shirts and our overalls, and go to Sunday School. We thought those were beautiful shirts out of them sacks and we were proud to have them.

"The first store-bought clothes I remember having was when we were living in an old log tenant house, plowing for fifty cents a day. We saved up enough money so that my mother ordered the first store-bought clothes I can ever remember having. She got them most

likely from the Sears catalog because there was always one around as far back as I can remember.

"Another thing we ordered with the money we made plowing was a .22 rifle and a flashlight. I remember we paid $4.10 with postage included for the rifle, and the flashlight, I believe, was fifty nine cents for it and batteries. Then we could go out in the fields at night and kill rabbits for our meals. We killed squirrels in the daytime. Sweet potato and opossum was a luxury to us back in them days, and I've even killed and eaten skunks. We'd try most anything. We ate gator tails. Now today, they are considered a luxury. We were always looking for something to eat. It was rough back in them times; still, I don't ever remember thinking of it as hard times. It wouldn't hurt people today to go back to those days, in fact I wouldn't mind it, really.

"We used to plow in the 1930's from sun–up to sun–down for fifty cents a day and be glad to get it."

He can't remember when his parents started making a little moonshine, but eventually making it on the side supplemented his family's meager income derived from the dawn–to–dark, back–breaking, strenuous job of tenant farming. It wasn't a big system; in fact, Sigers said, the family once even set their shine operation up in a rented two–story frame house on the outskirts of west Macclenny.

"Mama and daddy set up a copper still upstairs in the house," said Ralph.

"I remember it," said Willard. "I'd spend the night with you and I remember when the train would pass through at night and shake the whole house. They pumped water for it from an old pitcher pump."

"I remember when they made it out in the corn field, too," said Willard. "I'd come in from school and go out there and watch them," he said. "They'd tote their water from the old hand pump at the house to the field and she'd maybe make one or two five–gallon jugs from it."

The two men have always lived a "stone's throw" from each other. Willard's father, Londa, and Ralph's mother, Serena, were brother and sister.

"We could tell you tales from now to dark," said Willard.

The two men have more than just being related in common. Both were shrewd moonshiners, who operated their affairs on adjoining land.

"Other than when my brother Elzy served in the Army, he made moonshine most all of his life," said Ralph. "Marvin didn't do too much of it."

"After I dropped out of grade school, I took a few correspondence courses for radio repairs and such, and I opened a little shop in Macclenny and operated it until I went into the Air Force in 1942. After I served in the Pacific and was discharged in 1945, I did some moonshining, while I worked for the government in electronics at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station. I stayed with them for about 15 years.

"During that time, I dabbled on a small scale in moonshine at night. I never did get real big in it on an individual basis, because it took a lot of money and you risked a lot," said Ralph, who was married in 1942 to Suzie Crews, daughter of Lewis and Ethel Crews of Macclenny.



**Elzie Sigers while serving in the Army**

"I enrolled in school in Gainesville and learned how to build airplanes," said Ralph "I took flight training, and worked in the engine shop. I remember how hot that engine shop was, and during my lunch break I'd usually run out and take an airplane and go up real high where it was cold. No matter how hot it is on the ground, it is cold up there. I wound up with pneumonia doing that and have never overed it to this day," he said.

The Sigers' brothers common interest was flying and mechanical operations. After Elzy served in the Pacific theater during World War II as a paratrooper, he also obtained his flying license. But his full–time occupation was moonshine.

"I hired other people to work for me while I was working at NAS," said Ralph. "One day, when I came in from work, I told the crew working for me to go check one of the stills to see if it was ready to run that night. They told me they had seen signs that the revenuers

had been around there, but I thought they'd been mistaken because I'd been down there the day before and didn't see anything. I went down there and found the tracks, but I decided I'd go on to the still anyway which was at the Blue Hole. I had on my work clothes, just like I'd come from work, and as I was just starting to walk out on this log to get across to the still, I saw three of the revenuers coming out to cross the log meeting me.

"Instead of running I just went straight to them, and they said, 'What are you doing down here?' and I said, 'I'm walking this river looking for my boat somebody stole.' So they said, 'Well, there's one right down there at your still,' and I said, 'No, there ain't nary one at my still because I don't even own a still.' They said, 'Yes, you do, we know it's your still and you're coming to see about it.' They told me to walk out on the sandbar. I did and they said, 'Sit down,' and they looked at my shoes trying to match up my shoe tracks with the men who had been working for me at the still. When they couldn't do it, they said, 'We know you just came from the NAS, and if you don't quit this bootlegging, we're going to get your job, and we're going to throw you in jail.' And I said, 'I ain't bootlegging, I'm down here hunting my boat; I want to go fishing.' So they continued to talk to me, threatened me, and asked me a thousand questions. I said, 'If I'd known there was a still here, do you think I would come up here and talk to you about it? I'd have been going another way, or outrun you.' I told them they were just badly mistaken. Finally, they said, 'We're going to give you one more chance.' They asked me where my car was, so I took them there and they checked it over real good. Then they asked me to drive them to where their car was, and I did. They tore up the still.

"There were lots of stills up and down the river at the time. We made our own boats, welding them together. If it rained and the water started rising, someone would come by yelling, 'The river is rising', and no matter when it was, even late in the night, we'd go by boat down the river and move the stills up on higher ground," he said.

After 15 years with NAS, he quit, and went into the moonshine business full-time with his brother, Elzy. With a large tractor

and a scoop, the brothers dug deep into the ground at night and began operating an elaborate underground still located in an open field. It was entered by a concealed door covered with grass.

"We had kerosene burners at first, and it would make you sick down there because of poor ventilation, so we had to change over to gas. We used the big old groundhog stills under ground. In one, we had two, forty–barrel operations and some drums. It took a piece of metal 8 feet long to make a 30–barrel groundhog and the 10–foot sheets made a 40– barrel. We'd buy a semi load of sugar, which usually was about 240 sacks, to sweeten them things up. We'd put sixty 100–pound bags of sugar in each one, which would make at least 150 five–gallon jugs of whiskey."

Meanwhile, across the road, Harley Thrift, Willard's uncle was digging into the ground at night to construct him an underground still. Ironically, the Sigers were not aware of Harley's activity. The brothers had built three underground stills and had started working on the fourth when the revenuers raided Harley's one night, about a year after it had been built.

"We were working in ours at the time they raided Harley," said Ralph. "We shut down as quick as we could."

Harley Thrift was arrested and his underground still destroyed with dynamite. The blast shook the countryside for miles. While those activities were going on, Willard and his Uncle Elzy were hid out in the field listening, and Ralph was looking on.

"That same night me and Wallace Dupree had a truck loaded with 220 cases of whiskey parked behind my house across the road. As soon as we thought it was safe, we got it out from behind my house and saved it from being destroyed," he said.

All three of the Sigers' financially lucrative still operations were a half–mile apart. They had sold one, with a house on the property, to Dupree, a bootlegger from Macclenny who was their sugar supplier.

"We closed all of ours down and I think Wallace covered his up a lot later after he got the equipment out. We just abandoned the one we'd started. The law kept watching it, so we just never started it up again."

During the heyday of the underground still, when production was at its peak, the Siger brothers did a first for Baker Countians dealing in whiskey. They began to haul their product in an airplane,

"Sometimes, Elzy would circle around in the plane and look for revenuers. They finally caught on to Elzy hauling moonshine in the plane and planned to catch him," said Ralph. "What he'd usually do is land somewhere pre-arranged and the man he was selling to would have him five gallons of gas waiting to refuel. While they were unloading, the man would hand him the can of gas to refuel. Well, one time, the revenuers were waiting for him when he landed. Elzy saw them, so he just jumped back in the plane and took off before they could get to him. He stopped somewhere else to refuel.

"Actually that plane, which was a J3 Piper Cub, wouldn't carry much whiskey. It would only haul about four five-gallon jugs.

"One of our neighbors had a nice strip of land and he kept wanting us to land there which was in a cow pasture, so one day Elzy decided he'd do it. Our neighbor got all the cows penned up but one that was standing far off. Well, just as Elzy came in that cow ran across the pasture and Elzy landed right on the cow's back, and the plane just flipped over on its nose and tore up. Elzy wasn't hurt, and it didn't kill the cow, but the cow always walked around crooked after that, she never did straighten up, her back was all tore up."

The brothers rebuilt the plane.

The plane was not the only first ingenious plan for hauling whiskey that the Sigers brothers instigated. "Elzy built seats in our car out of copper tanks, then reupholstered it to look like regular seats. We poured moonshine into the tanks which would hold about 10 to 15 five-gallon jugs. He put a spigot on the bottom to drain it out when we delivered it. Elzy built tanks from the seats and back rest.

"We knew one night they were going to stop us, and as soon as they did Elzy jumped out and said, 'Oh, I know who you are, and I know you want to look in my trunk, so I might as well let you. So he opened up the trunk and they looked in there and said, 'Okay, you can go ahead,'. When they first pulled up that night, they asked us if we had any moonshine in the car, and I told them, 'No, but I was wishing I had some until you come along.'

"They never did find the liquor when we hauled it in that car," he laughed.

"We started breaking it down from five–gallon jugs to pints and quarts," said Willard. "I hauled it up to Phoenix, Alabama, in trucks made with false bodies. The tailgate was fixed so you could see up in the body and the truck looked empty, but in the second story was all this whiskey. We tried everything we could to outsmart the law," he said.

"Me and daddy had an old groundhog–type still in our truck and we'd park it right out there in the barn. If it got to smelling too bad, we'd have to move it, but when it got ready, we'd go down to the pond to get to the water to run it. It would usually take three or four days to make it," he said.

"Yeah, we had some mounted on trucks too," said Ralph. "We used gas burners on 'em."

"The revenuers were usually nice," said Ralph. "One day, I remember they were down at my parents little store and a bunch of us were all down there having a cold drink and crackers. When they finished drinking their drink, one said, 'Well, we're going on down the road and run the Barton boys the rest of the afternoon.'"

Willard agreed. "One night, there was this guy at a checking station up there at the Georgia–Florida state line, and he asked me and Glen Johnson one night, 'When are you ever gong to haul anything?' We had a load of whiskey then, and they looked in the back, but didn't see it."

"Yeah," said Ralph. "They'd take off in the lowest gear, and anybody in the world should have known it was a loaded truck. "

"They stopped me at a driver's license check one night just before Christmas up in Georgia," said Willard. " I had a Nabisco Cracker truck full of concealed moonshine on my way to Phoenix City, Alabama. I had a Georgia tag, and a Florida driver's license, and I showed it to the road patrol. He said, 'Well, where do you live?' and I said, 'Valdosta.' He said, 'Well, where are you going?', and I said, 'Atlanta,'. He said, 'Well, how come you got a Florida driver's license?' And I told him I'd just moved to Georgia. He said, 'I ain't going to give you very long to get you some Georgia driver's license,' and I told him, 'Well, thank you, sir.' I told him I was empty, going to Atlanta to get a load of crackers.'

"Just as I drove off and got to the top of the hill, I saw the law coming with red lights blinking. I said to myself, 'Oh, well, they figured it out, and they're coming to get me,' but they just drove right on past me."

There were endless stories of close calls.

"They arrested Glen Johnson one night for a traffic infraction and impounded his truck at the jail. It was full of concealed whiskey. They let him go the next morning, with his truck. It had been parked loaded at the jail all night."

Johnson was always in much demand to haul moonshine by the moonshiners, and reputed to be one of the most reliable and competent drivers around.

"I had a still one time right about where Joey Thrift has his old sawmill, back there in that old bay," said Ralph, blue eyes twinkling. "One afternoon, we were down there running the still and my worker was talking about the revenuers and he said, 'Oh, if they were to run in here on me right now I'd take this knife, and I'd do this, and I'd do that and the other.' Within about ten minutes they had him around the neck. I was right there but I ran just as hard as I could to get away. I went by one federal man named Spanks just a– flying, and he said, 'Stop, you son of a son and so,' and he was shootin' right at my feet, and me with boots on.

"I ran into the bay and my boots got all full of water and I couldn't run, so when I got far enough ahead of him, I pulled my boots off and got out on the other side of the bay where there was a man chipping pine trees. I said, 'If anyone comes by here looking for me, tell them I went that–a–way, and I ran and ran so hard that I bled from my lungs. They are still messed up to this day. I finally got back and holed up in that old bay and went up under all that underbrush where there were mosquitos and moccasins and everything else. I crawled around in there and finally got up on a little stump and the bushes were so thick on the ground they couldn't see me, but one time they were so close I could have reached out and got a–hold of his boot.

"When it got dark I finally got away from them people. I found out later there were at least 25 of the revenuers and that's why I saw one every which way I turned. I never went back to get my boots.

"One time, we had a big operation going on up in Georgia. We put the still up on the sheriff's property and his brother lived in the house. The sheriff always kept us informed as to danger. Somehow though, the revenuers got wind of the operation, and by–passed the sheriff to raid. Me and Elzy went up there one day and as we drove by, we could just sense something wasn't right, so we didn't stop. We went on up to see the sheriff and found out that the revenuers had already been to the sheriff's office with his brother under arrest. If we had gone earlier they probably would have arrested us, too.

"Things were beginning to get tough for us. I'll tell you why we finally quit," said Ralph seriously. "It got to the point that we were paying everybody off and it took our profit. Everybody was wanting a cut of the money. Finally, we were told we could not be guaranteed protection anymore.

"Do you have any regrets?" I asked.

Willard is quick to answer. –– "No, I don't." he said. " I can remember how embarrassed I was going to school, or into Macclenny, always wearing overalls. When I got older I'd wear my shirt hanging out so people wouldn't know I had on overalls instead of jeans. I didn't know you could tell the difference back then, and I don't reckon they could, but it don't matter now. I was about in my senior year when I got started in moonshine for myself, but I remember how proud I would be when I was able to go into Mr. Hodges clothing store in Macclenny and buy me some clothes. It was such a thrill for me to go in and buy a pair of jeans. I didn't ever buy overalls, I'd had enough of them, but now I wouldn't mind to wear them. I'd go in there and I'd feel like I was a big shot or something. Mr. Hodges knew time I walked in I was going to buy some clothes. That's where people like Wallace Dupree bought a bunch of their clothes and it made me feel good to be able to do it, too.

"And I can remember having three or four hundred dollars in my pocket and I actually thought I'd never need any more money in my life. I hauled for Wallace Dupree and he paid me $50 a haul," said Willard.

"We didn't make piles of money because it took a lot, especially when they'd tear up your still, but we got by," explained Ralph. "I

built my first house for $7,000, paying for it as I went along. I sold that house eventually and added $5,000 to it and built this house where I live now."

The Sigers brothers quit making moonshine about 1960. They worked hard at other jobs and through the years they pursued their infatuation with airplanes as a hobby. They bought kits and built their own.

"Daddy had an inventive mind, and I think one reason he was so involved in the things he did was to escape reality," said Beverly Hall, Elzy's daughter. "Daddy didn't have any education to speak of, but he was very smart. Had he been able to get an education he may have been head of a big corporation or something because he was very resourceful. His parents were illiterate, too, and instead of daddy being able to think about an education or what he wanted to do in life, he was having to think about planting a garden, or butchering a hog because farming was a year-round responsibility. His parents were not in the best of health, and in those days children took care of their sick or ailing parents, physically and financially. So daddy used his talents to create and invent with what he had to work with and escaped into his own world which became his only way of life."

On March 8, 1984, Ralph watched Elzy take up their new creation, an Ultra-Light, wood-constructed plane for testing. With 1,000 air flying hours to his credit, Elzy was excited about the 213-pound craft that was powered by a 20-horsepower engine. The plane was the first of five kits from the manufacturer that the brothers planned to build. It was about 2 p.m. when 61-year-old Elzy was flying over a wooded area near the Ode Yarbrough Road and CR23-A (Yarbrough Road intersection) when suddenly, and without warning, the craft came straight down, throttle wide open, and crashed nose first into the tops of several large pine trees. His beloved brother was dead.

The fatal craft that had been on its maiden flight was inspected by an official of the National Transportation Safety Board, and he reportedly could find nothing apparently wrong with it that might have caused the crash. Witnesses said that the craft did not appear to be experiencing engine problems, and they heard it operating until the craft slammed into the tops of several large pine trees.

Ralph thinks Elzy had a heart attack, or passed out, because witnesses said he was slumped over the controls which would have caused the ultra–light to go into a dive at full throttle.

Elzy's daughter, Beverly of north Macclenny, thinks not. "The autopsy said differently," she said.

Regardless, she feels her daddy died doing something he loved. "Flying made him happier than anything else," she said. "He didn't want me to get married when I did. He wanted me to get my own flying license or become an airline stewardess. He loved flying and he thought everyone else ought to.

"Daddy never knew anything else but moonshine, when I was growing up. His brothers had other jobs, but that's all that daddy did. Uncle Ralph was more of the mechanical mind, and Uncle Marvin was good at radios and electronics. Daddy didn't have the book knowledge and education that they did.

"He was good as far as being a daddy. He never spanked us, he was very quiet and gentle and kind, and he would give anybody his shirt off his back. I think that's why daddy never had anything, he gave it away.

"I was at least seven or eight years old when I realized daddy was gone a lot, especially at night. Sometimes he'd take us fishing down at the river and he'd usually walk off for a while. We knew he was doing something at his still.

"When we were asked our daddy's occupation at school, or had to fill out any papers, I'd always put farmer.

"Daddy took me lots of places with him, such as gator hunting. I remember shining the lights at night in the river looking for the gator's eyes to shine. That was illegal, too, but it was exciting. Daddy sold the gator hides. The reason he said he did it was to provide for us all the things he always had to do without.

"I remember we had an old screened–in back porch where he had stacks of sugar and wheat brand and stuff like that. Grandma and Grandpa Sigers had that old general country store up there on the road and that's where daddy would get his supplies. Except for school, we didn't go to Macclenny but about once a month, and I didn't bring many friends home with me from school. I remember having a birth-

day party once when I was about twelve, and I was embarrassed having all that stuff stacked up there on our porch. I felt everyone knew what it was for, but I feel sure most of them didn't even know. I was ashamed, and I wanted daddy to move it because we were having cake and ice cream back there, but he wouldn't. I knew moonshine was wrong, but it was the only kind of life we'd ever known.

"When daddy got caught at his still and had to go to prison, we'd go visit him, and he would cry. It liked to have killed him. That's when he started changing and getting closer to the Lord. When he got out and started driving a truck, he had a bad wreck and had to have a blood clot on his brain removed. That's when he quit altogether."

Eventually, Elzy Sigers became associate pastor of Mount Zion Congregational Methodist Church, located on 121 North near his home. His last days were peaceful, joyful, and happy serving the Lord and his fellow man. He and his brother, Ralph, became chicken farmers. Like the hobby of flying he so loved, his memory soars upward for his family. After all, they say, it is that which is found inside a man that counts. Their moonshine days lay buried as deep in the ground as the underground stills where they once toiled through the night.

And though the two remaining brothers have a new hobby, searching over land and sea with Hi–Tech, sophisticated, expensive metal detectors, they aren't looking for any kind of treasure in particular. And they certainly aren't keen about digging up their past. Instead, their treasure is focused on the future.

For many years, Ralph and his wife of 52 years, Suzie, have been active in the North Macclenny Christian Fellowship Church. In fact, he helped to construct it. The friends they have cultivated there are priceless to them. They are surrounded by children and grandchildren living nearby, and occasionally they take their motor home through the countryside so Ralph can get in some fishing and treasure hunting.

Still, there are moments when he reflects, and remembers Elzy, and the unique lifestyle they shared that will never pass this way in Baker County again. It is a legacy frozen in time, dissolved only with the warm memories they hold close to their heart.

# Seaf Rhoden

## Moniac/Baxter/Georgia Bend Area

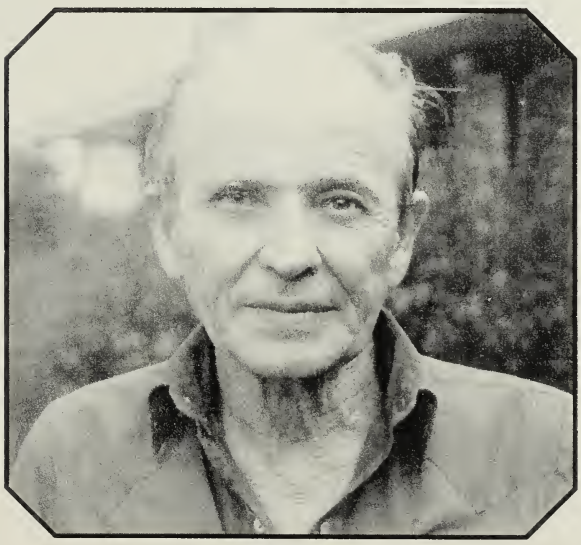
*"Sheriff Yarbrough and that beverage man sat right down on the log where I was hiding and started talking about me, and wondering where I had gone."*

*"The sheriff sent me word he had my shoes at the jail and if I wanted them, I could come get them."*

Seaf R Rhoden

Seaf Rhoden was not quite two years old when, on July 7, 1933, his father, Harley Rhoden, lay down by the fireplace with a stomach ache and died with a ruptured appendix. His wife, the former Novie Burnsed, reared her young son, and his sister Lucile, with a sickly step father.

"We lived in an old house that looked 'sorta like a chicken coop'. There wasn't much difference in it," he said, adding that, "Our toilet was out the back door."



**Seaf Rhoden**

He is not sure how much education he obtained, "I think I passed to the 6th grade but I'm not sure, I didn't learn much because I never went much. I think they voted me on up," he speculates.

By the time he was ten years old, he had left school and was working with his Uncle Enoch Burnsed, grinding cane and making syrup for the production of moonshine. By day, he and his uncle Enoch worked in turpentine. His meager wages went to support his mother and stepfather. By night, he and his Uncle Enoch worked in moonshine. He made a little money, but most of that went to assist his mother and ailing stepfather, too.

By the time he was twelve years old, he operated his own whiskey still.

"I put me down a shallow well and got me a couple barrels. I can't remember who I sold it to, but man, I thought I was really making money getting about $4.50 for a five– gallon jug," he said.

"Money went a long ways back then. I gave mama all I made in turpentine. I kept a little bit of what I made in moonshine, I didn't need much, and I gave Mama the rest to save for me, but I always came up short. I guess she needed that, too.

"After a while, I bought an old truck from Uncle Enoch for $100. Before you could put a shirt on to leave the house, it was broke down. I kept making a little moonshine for myself, but I mostly worked for other people and they furnished everything," he said. "The moonshine I made was better than anyone else, the best you could get, because I ran mine more cooler. The best quality of moonshine was made with cracked corn, soaked in water and sprouted, then spread and let dry before it's put it in the barrels," he explained. "Mostly I used scratch feed and let it sour and then I'd put me a handful of sugar in it and it would be better.

"I ran more times than I can count from them revenuers. They'd come up to your still while you weren't there and cover up with them feed sacks to hide. Man, if I saw one of them sacks move the least bit when I walked up there, I was gone, running out through them saplings. Them revenuers could slip up on you before you knowed it. And if you messed with shine long enough, they'd get you. If I was working at the still at night and I heard anything out in them woods, I'd run, and see who it was later."

He out–ran Baker County Sheriff Ed Yarbrough one day. Or maybe, he out–foxed him. In any case, he got away by hiding in a hollow log the sheriff decided to sit down on to rest.

"Me and a friend were working at the still on a real hot day," he begins the story. "I had one of them old groundhog types and my friend was busy washing the jugs when Sheriff Yarbrough came out of them woods and grabbed him. I had pulled off my shoes in case I had to start running, because I didn't need them on me a-flipping and a-flopping, so I just took off running through the saplings. The sheriff had a beverage agent with him, and he was hiding behind one of them big black gum trees thinking he'd snatch me when I ran by. I didn't see him until I was right on him, so I just took off running the other way, with him and the sheriff running behind me. I ran 'til I got to the swamp where I found a hollow log half submerged in water. I slid down in it and had just enough room to hold my head up out of the water far enough so I could breath. My body was so hot and steamed so bad that it looked like it was a two-barrel pot boiling down there. I could hear the sheriff and beverage agent talking. I lay as still as I could in the log holding my head up out of the water. Sheriff Yarbrough was wondering where I had gone to. They sat right down on the log I was hiding in to rest and started talking about me. When they'd cooled off and rested long enough, they left and I came out of the log. While I was crawling down in that log, I didn't take time to worry about snakes or alligators being down in it, and that old bay was full of 'em. I was just lucky.

"Later, the sheriff sent me word that he had my shoes at the jail and if I wanted them I could come get them. I never did go, of course, and I never went back to that still.

"Another time when I was working at a still, I saw a plane circling real high and I didn't think it would be revenuers because they usually fly low. While I was stirring the syrup, I had my hand resting on a barrel. Suddenly someone touched my arm, right about where my watch was. When I jerked it away, I took off out in the woods leaving my watch behind and them holding to it. Times like that were real close calls," he said.

Moonshining could have its rewards, and roughing it could be fun. "When we'd get to the still early in the morning, we'd set our fish hooks out, and while we were working the moonshine, the catfish would be biting. We'd take a coffee pot and some grits with us, and

while the shine was a-making, we'd skin the fish and cook them," he said. "That was some good eating."

His most treacherous moonshine adventure was three miles deep in the Okefenokee Swamp, he said. "We had this whiskey still out there on a place called 'Little Island' in the Okefenokee Swamp. We'd load up our boat at the bridge and push the boat, with all the equipment, about two or three miles up stream through the swamp to reach the still. If we didn't have any equipment, and we were just going to the still to work, we could save time by walking around the edge of the swamp about a mile or so. We'd see these big old green moccasin snakes about six inches thick around. They'd open their big old mouths as wide as a man's hand to hiss at you. I'd just go around him, and sometimes they'd be another one hissing at me on the other side. I couldn't afford to get scared, I had a job to do, and that was the only way I knew how to make real good money. Many a time I've walked right past the den of an alligator, or seen one on a log or submerged in the swamp waters, and just hope he didn't get me."

One of his friends was bitten on the heel by a 'big green moccasin,' he said.."I don't think he ever even went to a doctor. It just caused his heel to rot off," he said. " He weren't scared of them snakes, either. He'd just reach over, grab 'em, and either throw 'em, or kick 'em out of the way.

"Someone warned them revenuers about them big green moccasins and alligators being in that swamp. They went in there anyway one time but they didn't go back as far as I know. We continued to make shine on that Island for at least 12 years without any law bothering us."

Besides moonshine, Seaf hunted alligators for extra money, selling their hides. "I've skinned more alligators than I can count." he said. "I'd go from pond to pond and I've often killed six or seven in one evening. They'd usually be about six to eight feet long."
He used a .22 rifle to kill his prey.

"I usually had someone with me to help kill the gators. I'd get down in the water with a cypress pole that had a hook on it. Then I'd run the end of the pole with the hook down in his den and grunt from

the other end holding the pole in my teeth. That way, the grunting sound would go right down the pole."

Grunt is gator talk, he explained as he made the unusual sound. "You just make this grunting sound, like this," he said, grunting, " and the old gator will think there is another gator in his territory, and he'll come out of there to protect it. When that pole gets to moving you'd better clear out because he's coming out. He might come out in between your legs, too!

"I had one of them big old gators that was so old and tough come out at me one time. The bullets would barely make a white spot on his body when I'd shoot him.. I had to shoot him 22 times.

"When I went gator hunting by myself, I'd just have to get out of the water real fast and run up the bank, hoping I could get the gun fast enough and aim it in the right direction." Seaf said each gator's hide would bring $3–$4 each.

Seaf and his wife, the former Mary Williams, had four sons and one daughter. From the time his sons were small, he reared them to be fearless alligator hunters, too.

Seaf continued to make moonshine most of his life until one day, his luck ran out. "I was working at a still about six miles south of Folkston one day. When the revenuers invaded the still, there wasn't much of a place to run because they had us covered with about 25 law men in every direction. I tried to run, but I kept falling down in the slick pine straw from the saplings. First thing I knew, the revenuer had his hand on my arm and a pistol to the side of my head. He said, 'Where do you think you're going?', and I said, 'Well, I guess I'm going with you, you're the one who's got me.'

"They carried us up there to the jail and kept us about half the night. I heard them old jail doors a–clanging and a–banging and that was enough for me. They charged me a $500 fine and gave me five years' probation. That ended up my moonshining career."

Seaf said he gave up moonshine and went to work in turpentine and pulpwood. "It was a big difference in money. I made about $50 a week turpentining, and several hundred dollars a week, moonshining. But I didn't want no prison term, no siree! I decided it was time to quit," he said.

Seaf was married for 20 years before he came home from work one day and found his wife gone. "There weren't no use to cry over spilt milk," he said. He and the children stayed together.

Fun loving and jovial, he is well thought–of and respected by friends and family.

"He would never cheat you and I'd trust him with my life," said his first cousin, Berry Rhoden.

"He is the hardest–working person I've ever seen, and he's good at anything. Everything he does, he does it well," said Dean Rhoden, Berry's wife. "He's a lot of fun and he is an excellent dancer and the women have always flocked to him."

Seaf eventually left the turpentine business and obtained work at the Wiremill Company in Jacksonville. He is now retired on disability. Today, he lives comfortably in a three–bedroom brick home in Baxter on land willed to him and his sister many years ago by their father. It is a vast difference from the chicken coop house he shared with his family while growing up. His son, Joe, lives with him, and together they farm a little.

He doesn't plan, necessarily, to remarry. "Nope, a woman would be okay if you could get a good one to help you and all," he said. "Like one who would not throw your money away. Most of these women this day and time are big–time women. That's the reason you hear of so many separations. And some of 'em smoke them joints, and I don't care for that at all," he said.

Would he return to moonshining? "No, I won't go back into that. You'd have to be in pretty good shape to do that, and I probably couldn't run fast enough now to get away from the gators or the revenuers, and it would probably scare me to death to see one of them big old green swamp snakes open it's mouth and start hissing. No, I think I'll just stick to growing rutabagas and sweet potatoes. They're a lot better for you than moonshine anyway!"

# Elmer Lee 'L.E.' Wilkerson
## Also known as 'Swampy'
### North Baker County

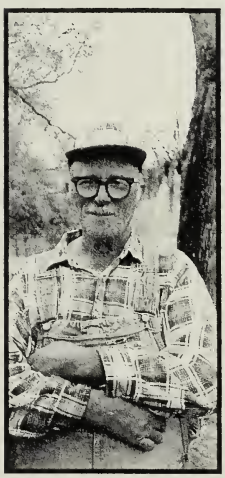
*"I swum the river and come up through the swamp and laid down buck-naked in them palmettos. Them misquotes liked to have killed me."*

*"I didn't care much about working anywhere else, or doing much else but moonshining."*

*"We had this old goat that would get just as drunk as any man you ever seed. We'd have to tote her to the house -- she'd be so drunk, she couldn't walk."*

L E Wilkerson

After meeting overall-clad L.E. Wilkerson for the first time, I wondered how I would describe him, or even if I could. After hundreds of interviews over my lifetime, I felt helpless to characterize the unique 74-year-old north Macclenny man whose manner certainly is one set apart from any other I've known. His slow southern drawl lends credibility to his classic backwoods charm. His intense brown eyes sparkled with mischief, yet you know he is a man of profound thought. He appears simple, yet complex. He seems innocent, yet you know he isn't. Uneducated, yet you know without question he is many, many notches above ignorance.



**L. E. Wilkerson at home (1995)**

Ed Yarbrough, former Baker County Sheriff, classifies the former moonshiner as a shrewd woodsman.

"Nobody could turn a leaf out there in the area where he lives without him knowing it," he said chuckling. "He has the nature of an Indian, and if you go near the area, he'll know you were there or have been there. He always knows everything that is going on, that's for sure. His world is right out there where he has lived all his life and that's it. He has never been far away from his environment and he don't care to be away from it. That's the only life that's ever been for him, and that's because he wants it that way," he said.

L.E. scarcely weighed two pounds when he was born to a poor farm couple, Elisha and Holly (Crews) Wilkerson, on homesteaded property that borders the big St. Mary's River that divides Florida from Georgia. He was the lone surviving child of the couple.

"They told me I was put in an old coffee pot when I was born, I was so little," he said. "I had yellow jaundice, whooping cough, the measles, and hives. They said I almost died."

"It's a wonder he lived," said his wife of 48 years, Lavon. "None of his parents' other children did."

Wilkerson grew up in a primitive, rough, frame farm home on 82 acres of land in north Baker County cleared for farming long before his birth by his Wilkerson forebears. He rarely left the area, though sometimes he walked the seven miles into town. He attended the Garrett Community School, often riding a horse. He went to about the fifth grade, he says, though he barely learned to read or write.

"I didn't like school and I didn't go much," he said. "I still ain't sorry I didn't go much. I make a living without that. I've seen some with an education that ain't doing as good as I am."

Why did he get involved in bootlegging? "I didn't have no better sense, I reckon. It was easy money. Well, it weren't easy money, it was fast money," he said. -- Faster than plowing a mule from sun-up to sun-down with his father in the hot fields, anyway.

"My daddy worked at a sawmill for one dollar a day. He went to work before daylight and knocked off just before dark, right across that river over there. I did the farming. I never took money from my daddy to do the farming because he was taking care of me."

By the time L.E. was 14 or 15, he met Wallace Dupree of Macclenny and began making moonshine for him along the isolated



**Moonshiner, L.E. Wilkerson arrested by beverage agents with load of sugar destined for moonshine still**

river banks and in the thick palmetto thickets of the secluded nearby woodlands. Wallace and another man, Bobby Johns, bought his whiskey and paid him one dollar a jug for it. By the time he was 17, he had saved enough money to buy a Model–A Ford. That ended his walks into town.

"I thought I was something. Back then that was a good car."

Unlike farming all day long, moonshining provided him with fast money in his pockets. In addition, he loved it! –– Except for the days when the revenuers came calling.

"They didn't catch me none," he quipped, "Unless they come up to the house to get me. In all my years of messing with it, I never did run from the revenuers but twice. I had stills on down the river, had 'em out in the woods, but don't you think beverage agent Floyd Bennett couldn't find them. He'd find them every time, and then he'd come tear it up.

"I drank moonshine, too. You don't supposed to make it if you don't drink it," he said.

Wilkerson was 26 in 1948 went he married 15-year-old Lavon Mikell, pretty daughter of Solomon and Evelyn (Pierce) Mikell.

"I knew L.E. was making whiskey when I married him," she said. "I never asked questions then, and I still don't ask questions now. When I was growing up, I was taught never to ask questions, because if someone wanted to tell you something, they would."

The couple moved into the house with L.E.'s father, Elisha, and his stepmother. His mother had died when he was young.

"L.E. mostly worked on the farm back then during the day and ran the still at night because he had to burn fat-lightered wood and it smoked so much, the revenuers would have spotted him," she said.

The couple had five children: Holly, Wayne, Windell, Billy and Susan. They now have eight grandchildren.

Wilkerson always evaded the beverage agents one way or the other. One occasion, when agents attempted to apprehend him at the still, he ended up naked.

"One day, me and Carl Rewis was making shine out there near the river," he said in his slow southern drawl. "Carl told me he suspected them revenuers was going to come that day, but I told him he worried too much. Old beverage agent Bill Eddy was sittin' right there behind the barrels at the time listening to us, but we didn't know it. Carl decided to take what whiskey we'd already made and hide it down the river, away from the still. When he got back, I asked him if he had seen any signs of revenuers and he said he hadn't. I asked him if he locked the boat, just in case, and he said he hadn't, so he went back to the river to lock the boat.

"Just as he walked back up the hill to our still, them revenuers reached out their hands to grab us. Buddy, we didn't wait around long when we heard him shoot that pistol. I headed straight for the river and jumped in. I stripped off all my clothes so I could swim faster. I left my shoes where they were at the still. They couldn't catch me, because back then I could go. I didn't know what was happening to Carl, and I didn't care. Anybody stupid enough to put a khaki shirt in his mouth and take a half hour to swim the river I wasn't going to worry about, and that's what he did. I swum the river and come up through the swamp and laid down buck naked in them palmettos.

Them misquotes liked to have killed me. The revenuers was all around me. If they'd been listening they could have heard my heart beat, 'cause I was done give out.

"Old Bill Alford was one of them revenuers, that day, and he'd done shot the lock off my boat. They were running up and down the river looking for me in it. There was nine of them agents on the Georgia side of the river. Later, when I made it to the house, I saw Carl's track where he had crossed that old wide dirt road. He had hit it one time in the middle. He was moving on. "

Wilkerson finally made it home without his clothes, but safe. "When I came walking up to the house buck naked they all knowed what had happened," he smiled.

Wilkerson said he got the last laugh. "Back then, if you got away fair and square and they didn't catch you, then they wouldn't arrest you later on. I put me two gallons of whiskey in my car and drove to town right past them. I had got away fair and they knew it, so they never bothered me."

Wilkerson remembers state beverage agent Bill Eddy, and other law enforcement officers as well, during those bootlegging years. "Eddy used to ride out here about once a week," he began. "He would drive by the house, go down there a piece and turn around and drive right back by the house again, then leave. He was a good old man. He had a job to do. He mostly did investigation work. He thought he was slick, too, but he wasn't.



**Moonshiner L.E. Wilkerson with hands on car after arrest by State Beverage Agent.**

"Ed was a pretty good ole feller. Asa (Coleman) was okay. I never heard of any of 'em ever taking pay-offs, and I believe I would have if they'd done it. I can tell you, they never took nothing from me or anyone I

knowed. People may get mad with 'em and say that, but I don't believe it.

"Floyd Bennett would tear 'em up as fast as I'd put 'em up. Then they got to blow 'em up, but old Floyd had a job to do. If you treated him nice, he'd treat you nice. Ed was a little rougher. But Floyd would be out there on top of the still before you knowed it. He was a good man, he sure was. Now, don't get me wrong, he'd catch you, but if you didn't talk about him, or mess with him, he'd be good to you."

His favorite law officer was G.W. Rhoden. "He was a good man. If he went to arrest you, you went one way or the other. He'd come talk to you nice. G.W. was the only man that could go get Sylvester Mann with no problem. G.W. would say, 'Sylvester, I've come for you,' and Sylvester would just crawl in the back seat and go with him. Everybody liked G.W.," he said.

"One evening, I was about five miles from my still and I looked up and thought I saw the top of a jeep out there in them woods. I just turned off and went out there and there was G.W. sitting there. I said, 'Where's Ed?' and G.W. said, 'I don't know.' I just kept sittin' there and direckly I seed Ed coming from toward where the still was, and they'd found it. They tore it up the next day. They knowed I knowed it."

"Bill Eddy used to wear this big old floppy hat; well, he looked like a tramp when he'd come out in it. He'd go in them bar rooms, and take him a little drink along and along. He said he'd get all the news he wanted, just by listening to the bootleggers in there. He said he'd set there just like he was drunk and he said, they'd just roll the talk out.

"Floyd Bennett came out one time and I had a jug of liquor sitting out there in the yard. I got a pea hamper real quick and covered it up and an old sow came along and liked to have turned it over."

Wilkerson got arrested by Sheriff Yarbrough with a load of sugar in front of his house one time. "We'd kept this old car, about a 1940 model, in Macclenny at my sister–in– law's for a year. Finally, I fixed it up and got it running. The very day I brought it home, and loaded it with sugar, here they come," he said.

"I said, 'Boys, here the law is.' They carried me, sugar and all in to the jail. "I posted bond. I served probation for it."

Lavon remembers the day well. "I was making pickles for all the family. We thought they'd think the sugar was for making the pickles, but they didn't believe that story," she said, laughing.

Wilkerson said he never hauled whiskey, only made it. "No, ma'am, I didn't do that. I rode with Wallace one time with a few jugs, and I told him then, 'When we get back to the house, I'll make it and you haul it.'

"I didn't care much about working anywhere else, or doing much else but moonshining. When I was a making moonshine, there wasn't many jobs available for the uneducated, but I didn't really want naren.' Once, I worked at a sawmill cuttin' logs, but I didn't like nothing but bootlegging. And let me tell you something. Some people say it was easy work. But that was the hardest work I ever done. You know them old tanks of gas we used, well, tote one of them up a river hill and you'll know how hard it is. And all them five–gallon jugs of liquor to tote down the hill to put in the boat, then take it out and tote it back up the hill. Well, you got troubles.

"I made whiskey, some at night, some in the day. I didn't like that night work. I liked to be home at night, and then I also liked to see where I'm a–going, and see what's a–coming."

The most he said he ever made at one time making and selling shine was $300.

How did he spend his money? "I spent it on groceries and cars and clothes. I didn't throw any away," he said.

Moonshining had its shining moments that now bring a chuckle to his family. "We had this old goat that would get just as drunk as any man you ever seed," said L.E. "We'd have to tote her to the house; she'd be so drunk, she couldn't walk," he said.

"L.E. would always tell me to tie her up when he went to the still," remembered Lavon. "He'd say 'How about tying her, she's going to give us away,' and I'd tie her and about the time I walked away and got out of her sight, she would be gone. She'd get to that still and she meant she was going to have the first drink."

"Yeah," said L.E. "We'd have to pour her some in something. I remember there were three of 'em drunk down there at the still one day. She was drunk, I was drunk and T.J. was drunk. What happened, she was trying to have her a kid and she couldn't have it, so T.J. and

me were going to take it, but they had to get drunk first. She had her baby, and she had a hang-over the next day, too.

"That goat drank pure liquor. We had to give it to her to get rid of her, or she'd stay right there until she got drunk and we'd have to bring her home. She pestered us so bad we finally had to get rid of her. She'd get on top of the still and have her feet all twisted and turned it would get so hot. She'd sit up there and eat the flour we used to keep the steam from coming out, then we'd have to re-flour it back up to seal it."

"I was running from the revenuers once that had spotted me from an airplane. I jumped in a ditch barefooted and split my foot wide open on a ragged stump. Someone in a car came by and picked me up by the road. We contacted Wallace and he took me to the doctor in Callahan. They just done it up and said it wasn't broke nowhere, but about 12 o'clock that night it got to hurtin' and Wallace got me in that car and I thought he was going to kill us before we got there. They x-rayed and found the bone was split wide open. The road patrol caught us four times that night running back and forth to the doctor; he was driving 120 mph."

That incident didn't slow him down from making moonshine. "No, it didn't. I made it right on. I rode the horse to the still and when it come sundown, that horse would bring me to the house; he wouldn't stay there no longer. He'd stand there all day, but when it come about dark, he was ready to go. He knew it was feed time. We really had some smart animals, smarter than we were," he laughed.

Wilkerson said most of his moonshine stills were constructed by Londa Thrift or his neighbor and long-time friend, Catfish Stokes.

" Me and Catfish made some shine together, and he made just about all the moonshine stills around here. Boy, it'd be a sight to see all the stills that boy has made."

He may have saved his friend's life once. "I was going hunting over in Georgia real early before daylight one morning, and it was cold, ooheee, I mean it was cold. There was an old wooden bridge I had to cross over and when I run up on the bridge, I said, 'Dad gum it, if that don't look like some of Stokes' signs there.' I went back and I seed where he went over in his truck. I said, 'Cat?', and he said, 'Yeah, get me out of here.' The truck was upside down in the water so I got

down in the water and saw that the doors were jammed. He'd been there about four hours with just a little breathing space in the cab of the truck. I told him I'd run up to Clarence John's Truck Stop, and get some help. He said he had a good quart of shine in the truck but he said he couldn't find it. Anyway, just his nose was sticking up. You just could hear him down there. I knowed it was Cat by the time I seed the sign where it went off. I don't see how come it didn't kill him. It was 32 degrees. When we got him out he acted like there wasn't anything wrong with him. He's always been a lucky Catfish. We've been friends ever since we've been big enough to know each other."

Wilkerson said someone came around once and tried to sell him some parts to stolen cars. "I knew they was stolen because they were too cheap," he said.

"There was a bunch of them fellers stealing cars and things and the law thought I was in that bunch, but when they come to search the house they didn't find no stolen stuff," he said.

"Bill Eddy thought he was slick, but he wasn't. He was constantly telling me he had something on me and wanted me to plead guilty, but I told him I didn't know nothing and if he had evidence on me then he could let me know at the trial because I wasn't going to come back down there. He lied about having pictures and such because he didn't have them and I knew it 'cause I didn't do what he was saying I did. I wasn't found guilty either, because I wasn't."

It was a different story with a different ending when the Federal agents came calling at his house early one morning a few years ago.

"It was in 1987 and my son Windell had met a girl that he let move in with him. They were planning to get married, but about a year after he met her she planted some drugs in his house and turned him in. She was a pimp. She told them I was involved, too. Them people come out here and searched my house; they never found anything, but they took plenty. They even took our toaster apart. They took every penny of money we had, even the baby's piggy bank. I said, 'Hey, it's Friday, leave us enough to get groceries,' but they didn't do it. They took all my hunting guns, even a gun that had belonged to my daddy. They even came up here with bullet proof vests on, 18 of 'em.

They held guns on us. I just don't understand that, but they can come up here right now and kick my front door down and there's nothing I can do about it because they are Federal," he said.

Many of L.E.'s friends thought him innocent. One was former Baker County Sheriff Paul Thrift. He went to court as a character witness for L.E.

"I knew L.E. Wilkerson. I don't think he had anything to do with it. I knew L.E. for years, and his dad before him. L.E. had bought groceries from me for years, and always paid his bill faithfully. He was honest, and I knew it. I don't think he had anything to do with it, that's why I went as a character witness."

Father and son were sentenced to five years in Federal prison in Atlanta. After a year they were released and put on probation.

Four of the Wilkerson's children live on the property close to their parents.

"They went into my house without a search warrant," said Holly. "They never found any drugs, but they took all of our hunting guns. They eventually gave us ours back, but daddy never got his back," she said.



**L.E. Wilkerson, daughters Susan and Holly (1995)**

How did he feel being a way from home for the first time in his life? "Well, I bet I had never even been to Taylor more than three times in my lifetime, but it wasn't so bad. We had air conditioning in the summertime and heat in the wintertime, and plenty of groceries. I got homesick, but it weren't no use. I could have come home anytime I wanted, just hit the road and come on. I got a seven–days vacation while I was there and I never heard of that before and neither had anyone else," he said.

"Yeah, one day they called and said to come get Windell and his daddy, that they could come home for a week. Windell wanted to fly home because it was quicker, but L.E. wouldn't do it," said Lavon. "They were home a week, then I drove them back up to prison."

"I had bought us an old van for $1,000 to drive back and forth while he was in Atlanta," said Lavon. " All he had was an old truck, and

the federal people didn't even want it when they arrested him, because it was no good," she said. " The van got us there and back. My job driving a school bus was the only thing that kept us going. Twice a month, when I got paid, me and the kids would drive up there. We went and came back the same day because we didn't have the money to stay over night."

"They tried to send me to school while I was there," he said, "but I didn't want no part of it. I told 'em 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks.' I was just a yard man up there, that's all I knowed to do, and that's all I wanted to do.'"

Windell was trained to make mattresses during his imprisonment, the couple said. Today, he works in air-conditioning.

"When L.E. and I got married, we lived in the house with his daddy and step-mama and there's no place big enough for two women," said Lavon. "So I moved to Macclenny and bought me some furniture and stuff. When he came to see me, I told him to go pay for the furniture because I wasn't going back, so he said, 'Let's move,' and I said, 'If you got a place to go to.' Then L.E. made arrangements for us to move into a house nearby where he grew up, so I was only gone one day.

"His uncle moved out the front door of the house and we moved in the back,' she said.

"The windows were broken out of that old house, and the tin roof was leaking," she said. "Just before he came home from Atlanta we bought this double-wide because I told him I needed something where I could be warm and dry. And we've been here ever since," she said.

It isn't that L.E. Wilkerson likes to talk about his life. He's really a private man. His children are proud of their daddy and they wanted him to tell his story. He loves his children and wants to please them. During the conversation, he was relaxed and talkative, even posing without a fuss for a picture which shocked his family.

"Well, I wasn't very proud of doing time in prison," he said, "but I didn't do nothing. I did make moonshine just about all my life. I made my last to sell in 1975," he said.

For the past five years he has worked for the City of Macclenny. "Well, I have to pay my taxes somehow," he said. "This place has always



**L.E. Wilkerson Family Photo (1955)**
**Front Row (l to r): Lil' Billy, Nikki, Rachel, FeFe, the poodle, Josh, Megan and Matthew. Middle Row: Paul holding Joshua, Selena, Christy, Laura, Lavon, Hollie, Susan holding Samantha. Back Row: Aaron, Windell, Billy, Wayne, L.E., James**

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been homesteaded, but about three years ago they poured the taxes to it. I never paid any taxes when it was homesteaded. I think that county commission just sits up there and figures out what they have to have, then they're going to get it. Yeah, that's just the way it is.

"I like my job. I do my work like I am supposed to, so I don't have to see a bossman very much. That's the way the city works, you do your job and the boss don't mess with you," he said.

What is his favorite thing to do? "Well, it would be bootlegging, if they'd let me do it," he said. "I don't even have to fish anymore; my boy goes all the time. He catches them, cleans them and brings them to me."

Would he like to reveal his best kept moonshine secrets? "No, I might want to do it again someday," he quipped.

# Tommy Register
## Macclenny, Florida

*"When that man came crawling over that fence, I asked him didn't he have to have a warrant, but he said no they didn't have to have one. He just walked right over to the hog pen and where the chicken house was, and looked in one of them holes and found it."*

**Tommy Register**

*"The night they took me to jail, we just talked all the way there about all kinds of things except whiskey-making. All of them people was nice. If you try to be nice then, they try to be nice."*

**Tommy Register**

Tommy Register was 22 years old in 1953. He and his wife, the former Imogene Dopson, were renting land and a dwelling from a man named Buck Rowe, south of Macclenny where they were living with their young son, Billy Ray. Times were hard, jobs were scarce, but Tommy was making a good living like many other Baker Countians ..... manufacturing moonshine .

The afternoon sun was setting in the west and a cool wind blew eastward. One good whiff of the afternoon aura attracted the attention of one passerby that would change Tommy's life forever. He was state beverage agent Phil Tomberlin.

As Tommy and his co-worker, the late Babe Rewis, lolled around in the back yard of his home waiting on darkness to fall so they could go to work, Tomberlin and three of his co-workers drove up to the clapboard house surrounded by a picket fence. Tommy sent Babe scurrying into the house while he greeted the men who were anything but casual visitors.

"How do?" Tommy politely asked as the men proceeded to come onto the premises without permission. "Got a search warrant?," Tommy asked, as the men continued toward the back yard where the chickens and hogs scurried around in their pens.

"No, we don't have to have one," came the beverage agent's reply.

"When he said that, I just hushed," said Register.

Phil Tomberlin followed his nose as the east wind continued to blow a slight breeze over the area. It led him south to a fenced in area where he climbed over the fence to get to the east side. Noticing four old-fashioned chicken coops behind Tommy's residence, he continued his trek to where he noticed a green rubber water hose that was oozing liquid. He bent down, picked up some of the dampened sand, and smelled it. His companion standing nearby suggested it might be soured wash water, but Tomberlin's keen nose told him different. Peering inside one of the chicken coops he discovered several six-foot-high stacks of Ball fruit jars and as far as he could see there were wooden barrels. Without a search warrant or regard for Tommy's request for one, the four men proceeded with the raid and made their discovery of the decade.

"It was the first of Baker County's reputed underground moonshine stills to be discovered by the beverage agents. Tomberlin's keen smell for fermenting mash and whiskey, aided by the eastern wind, had led him directly to the right place.

Tommy was one of five children born to honorable but poor tenant farmers Bart and Daisy Harris Register of north Macclenny. Unlike his older brother, Hamp, Tommy did not plow in the hot dusty fields alongside the rest of his family from sun-up to sun-down.

"I was the puny one," he said, in his typical southern drawl. "I was hospitalized one time for hookworms that I think they said had got in my kidneys. It's been over 50 years and it's hard for me to remember, but I think it was something like that."

With little schooling, Tommy turned to making moonshine at the age of 15. He sold it mostly to locals, but occasionally he hauled it to places like Valdosta, Georgia. He was earning a little spending money, he said.

"Daddy made us all a good living while we were younguns," he said. "We didn't go hungry."

During WW II Bart Register left the farm and obtained work at the shipyards in Jacksonville, but when they closed down he was out of work.

"Daddy and I made moonshine together. It didn't make us a lot of money because there were too many people making it, but it made us a good enough living," he said.

Making moonshine was not easy work. "No, you were always in a strain, watching, looking for someone to come along and catch you and tear the still up. Sugar was in 100– pound bags, and the whiskey weighed 55 pounds and that was pretty bad when you had to carry it a good ways. We toted a lot of ours on horses. We'd ride the horse to where someone would be with the car and supplies and then take the things to the still on horseback. The horse tracks would not easily give our location away because it was hard for the agents to tell what was going on with the horses. Back then everybody had a horse to help out with the work and they were all over the area,'. he explained.

At first Register said he ran his own moonshine still operation. "Then, when the ship yards shut down in Jacksonville, me and daddy set up some stills on high ground out there in the woods. He had to do something to make a living, at least until things got better.

"I've had to run three or four times but the revenuers never caught me," he said. "I remember one time, me and my brother–in–law were in my car up there at Lake City at a place called Five Points. We knew it weren't no use to run from the law because they could catch us in their car when we ran out of gas, so we tried to get us a good place to jump out and run. My brother–in–law fell down and they caught him, but I got away because it was night and they couldn't see where they were going and neither could I. The agents confiscated my car and all the whiskey that night, but they'd have took it anyway if they'd caught us in the car. As it was, at least I got away. I never did get caught by them until they finally caught me at the hole."

The hole was a 40x40 foot underground moonshine still operation located in South Macclenny near Woodlawn Cemetery, and that's

where he was the day the special beverage agents came calling. The still was owned and operated by him and his daddy. After 'the hole' was discovered by Tomberlin and his agents, they arrested Register and took him to jail, while his helper, Babe Rewis, hid out in the attic.

It was five years before Register would have a trial. "I come clear of the charges, I didn't serve nary a day, nor do I have one thing on my record. The judge said I was not guilty. He said I violated the law, but he said they violated the law, too."

The beverage agents admitted they did not have a search warrant giving them permission to legally go onto Register's property the day they came calling in 1953.

"When that man came crawling over that fence, I asked him didn't he have to have a warrant, but he said no they didn't have to have one. He just walked right over to the hog pen and where the chicken house was and looked in one of them holes and found it," he said.

"The night they took me to jail we just talked all the way there about all kinds of things except whiskey–making. All of them people was nice. If you try to be nice then they try to be nice," he said.

"The next morning, the revenue man came and got me from the jail and took me over to the Federal building where they fingerprinted me. We all cut the fool, joked and talked. I knowed them all and they knowed me. All of them people was nice. It was about 7:30 a.m. and I was out in the hall and the Clerk of Court came out and got me. He told me to come with him, so I went with him and he carried me back into a room adjoining the judge's chambers and told me to sit by the door. He had left it cracked a little and I could hear what my lawyer and the judge were talking about. So I knowed before I went into that court room what was going to happen.

"Later, my lawyer went out there to my house and made pictures and when the judge saw them pictures and seen that them revenuers couldn't have seen anything unless they had gone on the property, he didn't find me guilty 'cause he said they had violated the law, too. Boy, that revenuer's face turned red as blood, but he didn't deny he come on the property without a warrant," he said. "Of course, they could have gone and got a warrant and come back and tore the still up anyway," he reflected.

Two weeks after Register's still was destroyed by the state beverage agents, the agents received a tip phone call about another underground still operation. This one was located in north Baker County and belonged to Register's brother, Hamp.

"Back then people had just started tattle–tailing on one another," he said.

"Me and my brother never did discuss too much about each other's business," he said. "We didn't want the younger kids to know about it. We always figured the more you talked about something, the worse it was. If you didn't talk about it, there weren't no danger in it getting around. He helped me a lot if I needed help, and if he needed help, I helped him. He really helped me lots more than I helped him, like when our still would get tore up, we'd help each other get the stuff up to start another one. Sometimes, we'd pay him back, and sometimes we wouldn't; he'd just give it to us, or we'd help him do something he needed done. His whiskey operation was a lot bigger than what me and daddy had," he said.

"It took me a long time to make up my mind to put in an underground still. I'd never been to one, but I'd heard of the ones in north Macclenny that belonged to them Thrift fellers and them Sigers'. I guess I had mine about two or three months when it was torn up. It was about 7 1/2– to 8–feet deep and about 40x40 feet. Me and my daddy and brother–in–law used a bulldozer to dig the hole."

When Register's daddy left the whiskey business, he lived on Social Security until he died at the age of 74. His mother, now 93, is still living.

"I'm proud of my mama. She was a good mama, always wanting us to do what was right. She knew we made whiskey and she didn't approve of it, but she knew we had to have money from somewhere. I think people way back then weren't in it for gettin' rich, they were in it just to make a living for their families. There weren't no real good jobs back then," he said.

While Register was awaiting trial he went to work for the government, working in the Osceola National Forest. A year later, he joined Rayonier timber operation in Macclenny where he stayed for five years, working and living at least two of those years in St. George,

Ga. Then in October, 1958, he moved to Jacksonville and obtained employment with the City Parks and Recreation Department, working with the tree– trimming and planting crew. He retired in 1986 because of arthritis. He has had both of his hips replaced.

He and his wife Imogene have only one child, their son, Billy Ray, a physician specializing in family practice for the state of Louisiana.

"He's 42 years old and never married," he said. "He's got a big old house with 4,000 square feet in it and lives alone."

Register said he has no hobbies and stays around home unless he is visiting north of Sanderson with his mother who lives just down the road from his brother, Hamp.

"I don't ever think back too much about them moonshine days," he said. "It's something we used to didn't talk about. I figured we never would have need to either, but if someone wants to know about it, at least what I know about it, well, that's how it went, at least all I can remember of it."

# James Arthur Barton

## Macclenny, Florida

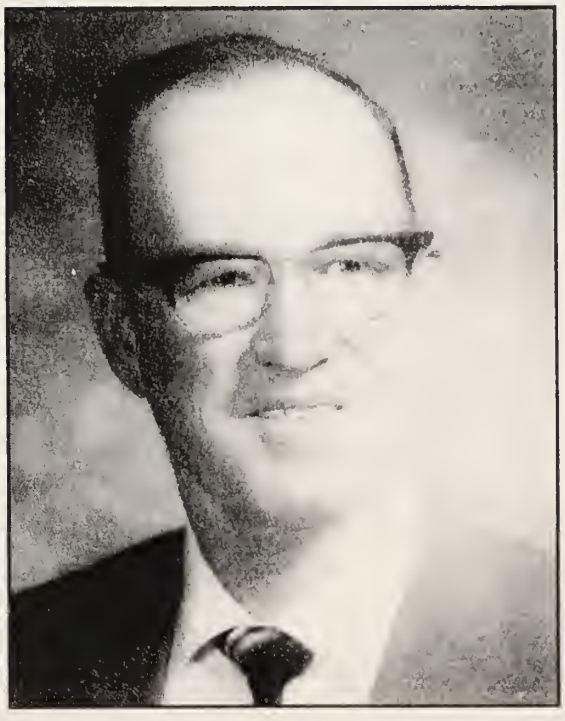
**Believed to be Baker County's first full–time employed deputy**

*"I worked the whole county by myself and made $125 a month. We thought that was pretty good money back then."*

James A. Barton

*"We weren't connected by radio with the Florida Highway Patrol. If I had to have help, I had to call my wife at the jail, and she'd call someone for me, and sometimes it would be thirty minutes to an hour before I could even get any assistance."*

**Former Baker County Deputy Sheriff James Barton**



**James Barton**

When the late Baker County Sheriff, Asa Coleman, approached James Arthur Barton one day in 1948 about a job as his one and only deputy, it caught the tall, soft– spoken gentleman by surprise. He had very little education, no training at all in law enforcement, and he had been a bootlegger. At the time, the 30–year–old father of two children was working at the local cold storage plant for thirty–five dollars a week. He told the sheriff he would think about his offer, talk it over with his wife, and let

him know. During the following three weeks he thought about his life and how the new job would affect him and his family.

He was born to Martin and Anna (Harvey) Barton in a section known as Barber Bay, north of Macclenny, on March 16, 1918. The first memory he has of life is riding on top of a mule–drawn wagon piled with furniture to his new home in Sanderson. He was about eight years old.

"My daddy and mammy owned a 25–acre farm, but they sold it and moved north of Sanderson to share crop for Lonnie Sweat, a man who lived in Jacksonville," he said. "Best I remember we moved in two wagons and a cart and they had to make two loads. It took us a day to make one trip. Nobody back then had a car or truck."

His father did odd jobs for cash money, like snaking cross ties in the swamp with an ox for Paul Knabb, or grinding grist at the Wester's grist mill in Sanderson on Saturdays. His family worked the farm, hoeing, plowing and harvesting together to have food for their family year–round.

"My mammy worked right alongside of us. She could plow just like a man. She would have to take off and go fix dinner or supper or something like that, but she was always working," he said.

When the Barton couple married they lived on the Coll Brown place in Taylor. Anna first gave birth to twins, a girl and a boy, but they died in infancy. Following the twins were nine sons and one daughter –– Ressie, Earn, Rhoda (their daughter), James, Martin, Jr.(called 'Monk' ), E.W., Lawrence, T.J, Lloyd, and Isaac Eugene, called 'Slick'."

When the children reached school age, they attended at Sanderson, but, he says, school wasn't then like it is today.

"At that time they only had school a few months out of the year," he explained. "Lots of the time we were needed to work on the farm, so we didn't attend. I think Ress, Earn and Rhoda went to school up there at Sanderson for awhile, then something happened. I think one got a whipping, and my daddy just quit sending us. I didn't get much education, but it wasn't nobody's fault. My daddy just weren't able to take care of all of us."

Within four years the family had returned to north Macclenny.

"I went to Garrett school a little after we moved back to Macclenny. None of us got to go much, maybe about 25 days in the

term. Then I started to school in Macclenny later. One day, some of us boys were caught smoking and we were reported to Mr. Lonnie Dugger, the principal. He told me he had to paddle me, but I told him I wasn't going to take a paddling. He wasn't a very big man and I was a big old boy so he said he'd have to expel me. So I just told him I'd quit. I ought to have taken that whipping and went on to school, but I didn't. He was a fine man, and a fine principal. It wasn't his fault. He had to have rules. I never have really got to tell him how much I thought of him."

When James left school he was in the sixth grade and 15 years old. He got a job farming for Mr. T.J. Knabb, a prominent Baker County land owner.

"I worked for him for ten dollars a month and room and board, which was one hundred twenty dollars a year," he said. "I gave my mammy and daddy five dollars every month, half of what I earned. Back then I could buy me a pair of shoes, a pair of overalls and a shirt for five dollars and maybe have a little bit of it left. Mr. Knabb always let me ride one of his horses home on the weekend to be with my parents," he said.

Later, T.J. Knabb sent him to live at the home of Bart and Daisy Register, who sharecropped land for him four miles north of Macclenny.

"Mr. Knabb gave me three dollars a week and paid my room and board. I stayed there a year, but I'd still go home on weekends," he said.

Mr. Knabb sent him to the home of Simeon and Sarah Register, the parents of Bart.

"I called him Grandpa Register," he said. "I helped with the farming and helped with the cows. He grew cotton, cane and corn. I stayed there about a year before I left and returned to Macclenny. Mr. T.J. wanted me to drive his trucks, tend to his cows, haul fertilizer, and anything else needed doing on the farm, like delivering."

He taught himself to drive Knabb's vehicles. "What happened, I just thought I could drive and I got his car and learnt myself. License were not required back then."

James moved back in with his parents and lived with them until he was 24 years old. Knabb paid him twenty dollars a month.

Meanwhile, he had fallen in love with Bart Register's daughter, Sadie. "When I first went to their home she was about ten years old, so we just talked, but we knowed we cared about each other," he said. "When she got a little older, we started talking about getting married but going to school was real important to her and she wanted to go so bad. So, while she finished school, I left and went to Alabama to work in the CC Camp. It took a day and a half to go by train and I remember it was so hot. The windows were open because there was no air conditioning back then and when we got there we were black from head to foot from the coal. Some other men I knew that went with me were Archie Rhoden, Hamp Register, Herbert Harris, Fraser Hodge, and Harold Wilkins. We made a dollar a day and they furnished our clothes.

"I stayed with the CC Camp for two years. Sadie graduated and had gone to work for the cigar company in Jacksonville, so we just ran away and got married. I hated to do that, but we were afraid her daddy might not accept it. All I remembered is when we used to ride the woods together marking and branding cattle and treating them for screw worms and everything else that needed to be done, we'd be riding along out there in them woods and he'd tell me that he didn't raise no younguns to give away. So I took him at his word. I knew that he knowed we cared about each other, you just can't keep something like that hid, I reckon.

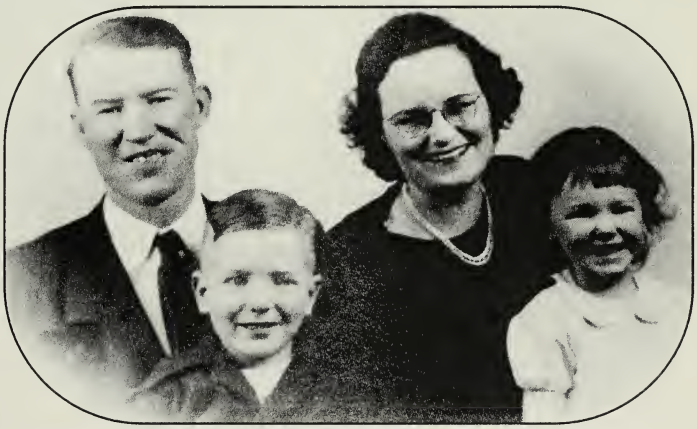
"We went over to Lake Butler to marry after I picked her up from her job at King Edward Cigar Factory one day. They had this little old newspaper down there and a bunch of her uncles lived there and saw it in the paper. I never will forget it. I had picked her up from work and took her home and I knew just as good when I walked in that door they knew it. Her daddy said, 'You younguns go in there and get you some supper. I know all about what you all have done.' And that's all he ever said. Sadie was his first to marry, and it wasn't like he didn't like me. Three of us Bartons married his girls. E.W. married Alma Lee, Lawrence married Pauline and I married Sadie.

"T.J. Knabb had died, but his wife, Leona, built me and my wife a nice little house, and she bought us the furniture we needed. She bought a stove, bedroom suite, and a living room suite all for one hundred dollars. She paid me thirty–five dollars a month and we paid her

ten dollars out of that for our furniture. Sadie quit work. She was sickly, but she eventually got straightened out.

"I left Mrs. Knabb after a year and went to Baldwin to work for the state for eighty dollars a month. After a year of that, I started working for the railroad for fifty cents an hour. I worked first as a laborer, then on the Camp car which meant I had to travel around. Sadie went back home to live and I came home on weekends. Then the war started and I went to work for the shipyard where I made three hundred and fifty dollars a week.

"Me and Sadie bought us a 40-acre farm from Mr. Charlie Garrett. It had a nice little wood house on it. Our son Larry was born in 1944 and right after him we had a daughter named Phyllis. I stayed at the shipyard for five years until it closed down. When I got back to Macclenny there wasn't any place to get a job that would support my family.



**James Barton, wife Sadie, son Larry, daughter Phyllis**

"That's when I started bootlegging. I knowed some people in it. They made money and I knew it. Me and Bart, Sadie's father, put us up six or eight barrels apiece and we started but we just couldn't make no money. They just kept tearing us up. Me and E.W. and Lawrence got to messing with it. It looked to me like we just weren't smart enough to get out of their way, or bad management, or someone might have been having something to do with it. You don't want to accuse anyone, unless you know for sure. I didn't clear but about thirty-five dollars a week.

"It finally got down to where Lawrence got to quit fooling with it. He went to work for Johnny Burnett. E.W. and me put up a little

place down there near where me and my wife was living. My wife begged me so hard to quit. She never wanted me to get in it. I went against what she wanted me to do, I can tell you that. When my baby, Phyllis, was born, I just told E.W. one day that I was going to quit fooling with it, and it just struck me like that. It was on a Sunday and I asked him if he wanted it. We had 16 barrels. He said, 'Well, I ain't got the money to buy it,' and I said, 'Well you can have it, I'm through messing with it.' He didn't think I meant it, but I did and when I come home that night Sadie had supper done. She'd done taken care of the younguns. I told her, 'Sadie, I'm done messing with whiskey,' and I never will forget what she said. She told me, 'I'll help you work, and we'll do all we can together,' and she meant it.

"After I gave up bootlegging, I went to work for the cold storage plant in Macclenny for thirty-five dollars a week, and that's where I was working one day when Sheriff Asa Coleman drove up and said he wanted to see me first chance I could get. I thought one of my brothers was in trouble; I had no idea what he wanted with me.

"When I went uptown I saw him parked in his car and I went up to him and asked him what he wanted to see me about. He said, 'Get in and sit down,' so I did. He said, 'James, I want to give you a job,' and I said, 'Mr. Asa, what kind of job is it?' and he said, 'Deputy sheriff'. I was shocked. I said, 'Now, Mr. Asa, we're going to have to talk about this.' I said, 'You know in your mind that I bootlegged awhile.' I said, 'It's been three years ago or longer.' And he said, 'Well, you quit it, didn't you?' And I, 'Yes, sir,' and he said, 'Well, you going to stay quit?' and I said, 'Yes, as long as I can get rations for my family, I am,' and he said, 'Well, I'd like to give you the job and you and your family move into the jail and take care of the jail and work the county.'

"I told him I'd have to think about it and talk it over with my wife. I knew that just about every law man I knowed had separated from their wife and had troubles, and that weren't going to happen with me. Well, I came home and told her and we took two or three weeks talking about it. We eventually made up our minds to go down there, but I went back to Mr. Asa and said, 'Now Sheriff, you know that I know just about everybody in this county and those that are messing with moonshine. I want you to tell me just exactly how you want it

run, and if I accept the job, then I'll do what you want me to do.' He said, 'James, I realize you know all these people, but you aren't going to have time to get out in these woods and find no stills. If you get a report on a still, you check it out, and we'll go tear it up. If you stop a car and there is moonshine whiskey in it, you make a charge against who ever is driving and let them go through the court.'

"I accepted the job and moved my family in the jail. My wife did the cooking for us as well as the people in the jail. She ran the radio, too, and she was paid seventy five dollars a month for it. I worked the whole county by myself and was paid one hundred twenty–five dollars a month. We thought that was pretty good money back then. It weren't costing us anything for rent or our food. The city paid Asa seventy–five cents a day for anyone we put in jail and Asa gave that to us. Whatever we ate, the prisoners ate. If we ate stew, they ate stew; if we had chicken, they had chicken. I've had lots of people come back to me and thank me for being so good to 'em."

James said he was busy with deputy duties, working about 16 hours a day. "Sometimes I didn't even take my shoes off," he said.

Eight years later, Sheriff Asa Coleman was called to Tallahassee by the Governor of Florida. He was asked to give an accounting of his arrests for moonshine operations in the county.

"My wife and I had to go there and take the records. They asked me if I'd ever helped tear up a still and I said, 'No, I've never helped tear up no still. I ain't got time to fool with the whiskey business.' They asked me if I knew where one was, and I said, 'I don't have time to go in them woods and hunt no still.' I was a busy man. That's the worst eight years I've ever worked.

"Now if someone had come to me and told me where one was, I would have told Mr. Asa and we would go out there and tear it up. I had the records with me where I had made a lot of charges and even today I bet you could check the records and I bet I made more cases against moonshine whiskey than any man ever has in any eight years they want to pick out. All the cases I made in this county I got 96 percent convictions out of 'em. Most of 'em put up a bond and would never show. I had to put some of my brothers in jail, and it wasn't because I hated 'em, but I was putting other peo-

ple in jail. I told them before I took the job that I was trying to make an honest, straight living. I said, 'If you all get to drinking and fighting, you better go to another county because if you do it, then you'll have to go to jail like anybody else. I had to put Monk and Lloyd in jail for fighting. Monk drank bad. They never did get mad with me. They knew I was doing my job. I never did pay none of their fines either. .

"I knew that Junior Crockett was marked as the King Pin Moonshiner and others, like my brother-in-law. I never went to see his still. I knowed when the beverage men were watching something out there, but I never interfered with them. They had their own job to do. I never did warn the bootleggers. Mr. Asa didn't do it either. He was a man that I'd believe anything he told me.

"As far back as I can remember, just about everybody in Baker County had a little old farm with three or four barrels of buck sitting there, getting 'em some groceries. That was before there was any pulp wood jobs available. There was some turpentine and cross tie business, and one little ole nursery over there at Glen St. Mary. There was no employment in this county. There was a lot of younguns being fed from moonshine, and that's the way I felt and I believe that's the way Asa felt.

"As far as I know, what I done was aboveboard. I didn't care who knowed what I done. In those days no one had big operations. I didn't go to any of 'em and tell 'em to quit. How a man makes a living ain't none of my business. They were not criminals. They were doing it to feed their family, and I don't hold it against any of 'em.

Asa Coleman decided not to seek re-election when election time arrived. James decided he would try for the job.

"Asa talked with me and asked me if I'd run for Constable, but I told him there was no way I could feed my family. I told him if I was going to mess with it, I needed enough to live on. I sure enough didn't want to be a crook again.

"I didn't know that Asa and 'them' had made a deal for Asa not to run and for Emory Jones to run. After Emory lost the election in the first primary, I'm sure Asa voted for me, but if I had to say today, I knowed he voted the first time for Emory. I lacked about 95 votes,

beating both Emory and Ed Yarbrough in the first primary, and Ed didn't beat me but less than a 100 votes during the 1956 general election."

Yarbrough had come on the scene backed by many Macclenny businessmen who wanted to clean the county of moonshine and the reputation it had acquired. They wanted better for their children, they said.

"If I had been elected sheriff, there would have been some changes because the state law was beginning to change and they were being more supportive. There wasn't much Asa could do with one deputy. And there wasn't any money for another deputy. The county owed Asa money lots of time when they didn't have enough money to pay him. If I took an oath to do it, I would have done differently than when I was working for Asa. But I did as he told me.

"After we went to Tallahassee before the governor, I went with the federal men. My name is on the warrants. The governor told Asa that we'd better go to work and clean up the bootlegging or they would suspend him. Asa asked me later if I knew where a still was that we could tear up. I knowed it was my job if it came in front of me, but I didn't go looking for it. When Asa asked me, I told him where I thought one was and we went out and tore it up. Later the beverage men would come out here and get me and I'd go with them. I was with them when we caught friends and relatives.

"After I got to working in it, I really went to work and started looking for signs of it. I'd call the beverage men myself if I thought I knew where something was going on. But I ain't lying to you, I did not have time to get out there by myself and do it. If I got after one of 'em with whiskey on their car I couldn't catch 'em because they had their cars fixed and you couldn't run them down. Even the highway patrolmen couldn't catch them, so there was a lot more involved than just maybe more than what I could do and what I ought to do. I was in some bad spots.

"When I was working as a deputy we weren't connected by radio with the Florida Highway Patrol. If I had to have help I had to call my wife at the jail, and she'd call someone for me, and sometimes it would be thirty minutes to an hour before I could even get any assistance. I burned the motor up in my car chasing someone up as far as

Lake City and I had to call and get someone to come get me. After that, Asa got me a new and different kind of car and Everette Moran fixed it so I could catch 'em.

"And another thing. If you messed with some of them people it could be dangerous for you and your family. Law enforcement was limited in those days.

"I have always tried to live my life as best I could. Some things I learned early in life. I got drunk once when I was 14 years old and I made my own mind up that I wasn't man enough to handle that there drinking. I quit it and I bet you a dollar that a pint bottle would hold every drop I've drank since then. I'm a man that knows when I can't handle something. I never did smoke much, I never gambled. I used to shoot a little pool, not for money, maybe sometimes I'd shoot for 15 or 20 cents a game, but what little bit of money I made I tried to build something for my wife and my family.

"I always figured that moonshine would take care of itself when jobs opened up, and I'd say at least 65 percent of the people dealing in moonshine quit and went to work when the Northeast Florida State Hospital came here. Before, there was just no employment to speak of for people in the county so a man could make a living. I don't know what some people would have done without the income the moonshine brought. In later years, some of them took advantage of the moonshine and did it for personal gain and the money, and not to survive. Had I been elected sheriff I would have gone to the main ones that I knowed were making it and I would have told them, 'Now I'm the sheriff and this is going to stop, and if you don't, then be looking for me because I'm going to come after you.' If I took that oath to do it, then that's exactly what I would have done. And then if I caught them that would have been tough.

"Asa didn't ask me not to do these things, but he told me I wouldn't have time to go out in the woods and look for it. But what he told me was, 'James what in the world would these younguns do without it? He did tell me this, 'If a beverage man, or some law enforcement agent comes and asks you to help, then you help them. That's our job.' But they never came. When I left the deputy job I was

making $325 a month. It cost seventy five cents a day to keep a prisoner back then, now I think they say it costs $50 a day."

James worked as a prison guard at Raiford after his defeat by a narrow margin at the polls. He ran for Baker County Sheriff a second time, knowing, he said, that he could not get elected, but to please many people who encouraged him to.

"The first time I ran I felt good about it, but my wife told me to accept the way it went and the Lord would have something to do with it, and I did. I never worried about it.

"The second time I ran was against Ed Yarbrough, Joe Newmans and Paul Thrift. Joe Newmans won the election that time. After I retired from the state, Joe asked me to come to work for him as deputy . My job was to see that the prisoners had so much exercise and sunshine that was required by law for them to have."

That experience brought about a narrow escape for him, but fouled an escape for two criminals. The incident happened in 1987. It made headlines in the Wednesday, March 11, Florida Times Union with a full 6 x 9 color picture of tough and gruff looking James holding his pistol in hand.

The story related how former auto racer John Paul Sr. and another inmate at the Baker County Detention Center in Macclenny squirted a mixture of hot sauce, black pepper and Pine–Sol in James' eyes and then tried to scale a 12–foot fence. James' glasses shielded his eyes from the mixture and he quickly fired a warning shot at the would–be escapees.

James stated that after the two men squirted him with the mixture from the plastic shampoo bottle that had been provided to inmates, he fired the warning shot. One of the men scaled quickly to the top of the fence with the other right behind. The mixture had hit him on the right side, splashing his face, glasses, jacket and pants.

"It burned just a little bit on my right eye and lips, but I think it was just the fumes," he said. "After I shot at that guy perched at the top of the chain–link fence and told him to stop, he fell back inside the yard and the other man froze, before he began to climb."

James forced the men to lie face down on the ground. "After that shot, they didn't say anything," he said. "I was the one then doing the talking."

After the incident, a pickup truck reported stolen in Gainesville on March 3, was found with its motor running in the detention center parking lot. It had apparently been placed there by someone helping the two men escape.

"They thought I'd grab for my eyes, but I grabbed for my gun," James said. "If it hadn't been for my glasses, it might have worked too."

Most of the time, James said, his job was routine. He remained with Joe Newmans for 12 years, and said he enjoyed his work. He also worked part–time for the city of Macclenny on Saturday, doing security work, such as guarding working prisoners."

The only two real tragedies in his life were the loss of his beloved Sadie in August 1961 at the age of 40. Three years later his only son, 20–year–old Larry, was killed in an automobile accident while car racing with several of his friends. The emotional pain still haunts the quiet–spoken man who played such a big part in Baker County's history.

He is quick to thank the Lord for sending a good companion into his life. For more than 30 years he has been married to Shirley Courson, a 40–year employee with State Farm Insurance.

"She's as good a woman as I've ever seen," he said. "The good Lord has helped us."

Shirley agrees. But, she says, she learned quickly in the marriage to let the quick–tempered man have his say first. "Then it was all over," she laughs.

The two met at the Farmer's Market in Jacksonville while selling produce. She was 27, he was 46. After a year of courtship, they married in Folkston, Georgia, while on their way to Patterson, Georgia, to meet Shirley's parents.

"We just decided to do it at the last minute," said James. "So we stopped over in Folkston and did it before we got to her folks."

Daughter Phyllis received a phone call from her dad with the news the day she returned from church camp."I just want you to know I just got married," James told his daughter.

"You did!" exclaimed his daughter. "Well, who did you marry?" she asked him.

"I had met Shirley once before," said Phyllis. "Dad brought her to my high school graduation. I was told that Shirley had wanted to wait until I had graduated before marrying dad, so that's what they did."

Phyllis is quick to praise Shirley. "She is a wonderful woman. I know dad and Shirley would have helped me all they could," she said. "They took me to New Orleans to begin nursing school and paid my semester. Someone, and I think it must have been Shirley, made sure I had a bank account set up with money in it."

It doesn't take any time at all to feel the immense independence of his daughter. "I knew they had their lives and I insisted in paying for my own education. I knew they would help, but I wanted to do it on my own," she said.



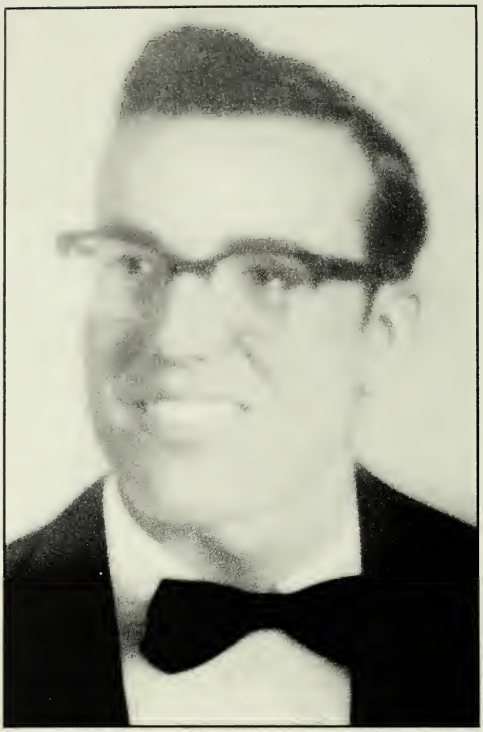
**Larry Barton: All Conference Wildcat Center - Jersey #41. Killed 1964**

Within six months Phyllis was home. Heartbroken. Her only sibling had been killed. The year was 1964.

Tears flow from James, Phyllis and Shirley. The incident is still painful and vivid.

"I never had any children of my own," says Shirley. "James and I raised two of his brother Slick's children when he died. Martha was eight and Russell was seven. We became their legal guardians and they seem just like my own children.

She shares the grief of James and Phyllis when they speak of Larry. "Larry was friendly, and everyone's friends," said his sister, trying to maintain her composure. "It is still hard to think about after all these years," she said. "He loved sports and played center for the Wildcats and was All-Conference. His jersey was number 41," she said.



**Larry Barton**

"He never gave me any trouble," said James, wiping tears from his eyes. "He was always a good boy."

Brown-haired, hazel-eyed Larry, an employee of the railroad, was married to Claudia St. John, his high school sweetheart. They had one daughter, two-month-old Tonya, when Larry was killed.

"Tonya is now thirty years old and I gave her a little piece of land so she could be right here near us," smiled James.

"And I'll be moving here too," said Phyllis, "just as soon as we sell our home in Tarpon Springs, Florida.

"When I was a kid growing up, well, like a lot of other kids, I thought I was really smart and knew what was going on in the world. I thought that I was probably smarter than my parents. Well, I've often thought about that over the years, and I remember that my dad said he never had a whole lot of formal education. But, as I got older I got wiser and realized my parents were, and are, a whole lot wiser and smarter than I gave them credit for and I just want daddy to know that now after having raised children I can appreciate what a wise man and a wise father he was. The older I get the more I realize just how wonderful it has been to have him for a father.

"I was 15 when my mom died, and I have really good memories of her as well, but dad and I have had 48 years together and he is just a great man. I didn't always do what he wanted me to, I'm sure," she said, glancing at her father's tear-stained face through her own tears.

"You children never gave me no trouble, and I've missed you since you've been away," her father told her.

"I'm glad to be back," said his daughter.

Phyllis returned to nursing school after Larry's death, first attending Lake City Community College.

"I needed a car, and daddy signed my loan" she said. "Later, when I finished nursing school I went to buy a new Plymouth. The bank said I'd have to have daddy sign, but I told them I had paid for the other car. I had never missed a payment, and if that wasn't good enough to get a car on my own signature, I told them to forget it."

She got the new car. Today, she also has a master's degree in nursing. She paid for it all. Her title is Phyllis Barton Lewis, RN., M.S., ARNP. She's employed with the Baker County Public Health Department as a Family Nurse Practitioner. While James said he's proud of all the education she's acquired in the career she loves, he hopes she is through with school so they can spend lots more time together.

"I think she'll always appreciate going to school," said James. "I wish I had gotten more education."

Phyllis married Homer Lewis in 1973 . They have one daughter, Jennifer Lewis, now 20 years old and a student at Palatka Community College. She is proud of her stepson, Greg.

"The only reason he isn't mine is because I didn't give birth to him," she said. "He is married to Linda Williams and they just gave us a grandson, William, who is nine months old," she smiled.

Shirley is quick to praise the family she married into. "I just feel like I got into one of the best families I could have gotten into," she said.

A few years ago, they added a 30x32 room onto the back of their spacious ranch-style home to accommodate Shirley's mother. At one end of the room is a large brick fireplace enhanced by a brick wall that lends a homeyness to the atmosphere. With her three sisters, they take turns staying full time with their mother, 85-year-old Maude Courson.

Shirley's dual role as a career woman and homemaker is no super-charged challenge for her.

"There was a time she even helped get out and make the garden," lauded Phyllis. "Now she keeps three 26–foot freezers full and cans vegetables as well from their garden."

James plants a garden year–round. He invites friends, neighbors and relatives to partake of the bounty. He spends time with his grandchildren, fishes some and keeps an immaculate yard around his 40–acre spread on Highway 23–A north.

He attends Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church regularly and does all the dish washing after monthly fellowship meetings.

"I don't mind doing the dishes; in fact, I like it. I do them at home, too, but I don't much like the cooking part," he said. "I even clean house a little."

The days are much more peaceful for him now, even when some painful memories of the past haunt his mind. He knows that an era like he experienced in Baker County will never pass this way again, and though the times were hard, and memories sometimes sore, he has no regrets that he was there to play an important part of the historical scene.

* * *

James Barton died suddenly on Tuesday, May 9, 1995.

# G.W. Rhoden
## 1994

*"I started out bootlegging when I was about seven or eight years old."*

*"My dad was working for a dollar a day sawing logs when he could get work and making moonshine when he wasn't. He'd have to ride an old mule to work before daylight and back home after night."*

*"My shot hit him right side of the head, but I had to kill him or be killed. I wouldn't go back through all that mess again, nooooooooo."*

G.W. Rhoden has gone from a mule–and–wagon–days–child moonshiner, to a fast–car–catch–'em–and–arrest–'em sheriff's deputy –– two power–charged careers that spanned more than three decades. He has known and lived on both sides of the law.

At one time he knew every family in Baker County, where they lived, how they lived, when they went and when they came. He knew what kind of car they drove, who they were kin to, and what they were up to. If a stranger wandered into town, he knew that, too. To all, he was a man of his word that both



**G. W. Rhoden - Moonshiner Turned Deputy Sheriff**

the law-abiding and not-so-law- abiding trusted, respected, called their friend and held in high esteem.

How did he do it? This is his story.

It began December 2, 1929, when he was born to Raiford and Ethel Rhoden on a farm north of Macclenny.

"I started off bootlegging when I was about seven or eight years old," he said. "We had a still about two miles from our house. Daddy would take me with him in the mule and wagon and when we'd get there he'd put me up in a tree with a fork in it and that would be where I'd stay to watch for the revenuers while he worked to make the shine. Well, I just kept helping my daddy as I grew. He'd send me to the house to get a 100-pound sack of sugar and I wasn't big enough to lift the sack on the wagon, so I'd get it on a stump and then roll it up on the wagon."

It was during the Great Depression. Work was hard to find, if not impossible. Men had no money for their family's shoes or clothing and were lucky if they found someone willing to exchange those commodities for farm eggs, garden vegetables, fish or game.

"My daddy made shine out of necessity," he said. "Everybody knowed how to make it, you could get up in the mornings and if a person had a liquor still you could see smoke coming from it if they had it fired up that morning. It was just a way of life, either every one was doing it or knew someone involved someway. I kept helping daddy until I learned how to make it myself. I remember one time daddy had me on the road with him and we thought the law was out there somewhere and daddy said, 'If they come by and ask you if you know where a moonshine still is, say, 'Yeah, I know where one is,' then say, 'Mr. Knabb's got a big one up there at Woodstock, a real big one.' '

"Daddy knew Mr. Knabb had a turpentine still there and he thought that would throw the revenuers off.

"Daddy was working for a dollar a day sawing logs when he could get work and making the moonshine when he wasn't. He'd have to ride an old mule to work before daylight and back home after dark. After I got to be a teenager, about 13 or 14 and I think about in the 10th grade, daddy moved to Jacksonville to find work, and I moved in with my Aunt Carey Rhoden and her family. It was known that I knew how to make liquor so I was contacted by a few men who told me if I'd make liquor for

them they would give me a job. So they paid me a $1 a jug to make it and they furnished everything. We had 28 barrels that would run about 30 jugs of liquor a week.

"I started making good money, at least it was in those days, so I quit school. I had so much money I couldn't tote it and had to keep it in a dresser drawer. I made more in two days than daddy made in a month if he worked everyday. I didn't buy a car or nothing, I just spent that money somehow, I don't remember how I spent it. Then the revenuers tore the still up. After that three other people, put up the money for a still and I ran it for them. Soon after that they came out with these planes and they could spot the stills from the air.

"One day a friend said to me, 'That plane found that still yesterday, I saw them circling, you better not go down there.' I had another boy helping me and we waited around until after dinner and didn't see anyone so we decided to go on down there and the revenuers were there waiting for us. We got away. We ran through the woods and they were shooting over our heads trying to scare us. For awhile after that I didn't make too much whiskey.

"After the Depression and World War II was beginning to start, sugar was hard to get to make the shine, and that's where Junior Crockett came in. He started selling us syrup and that's how he got rich. He helped everyone because he would bring us the syrup and if we didn't have the money he would swap syrup for the shine and we could make more and sell more with him helping us. I was too young to go off in the service, but a lot of the moonshiners got called off to war and when they got home they started bootlegging again. Only this time it was different. They wanted to make some money fast so they got these big old steel vats and that's when they started making 50 jugs a run. Things got all out of hand and the people were making whiskey different. It wasn't good whiskey anymore.

"I married in 1947 and we had two children. I went to work for Mr. E.N. Brown, a sawmill man. I began to see that it was wrong and it wasn't for the reasons bootlegging was done in the '30s and '40s when people did it to survive because there were no jobs available to them. This county was covered with moonshine stills. There was more liquor being made here than you've ever seen in your life. Out there where I lived, I could ride

a horse to a number of liquor stills in just a little while. Almost every farm had a liquor still. I mean, people made that much liquor and making so much money, you can't even imagine how much. I saw paper bags filled with it.

"It got so bad you couldn't even let your wife go up town. The bootleggers and bolita sellers would pick a fight with you over nothing and make slurring remarks. They were taking over and if you didn't do like they said to do, they'd have you caught. Loyalty failed, and some of them just took over. This place got just about like that 'Walking Tall' movie. Gambling was open on the streets. They had their books right out in their hands in the public. We became known as a notorious county and the bootlegging capitol of the world.

"I started working for Mr. Jones and Mr. Nagle over at Pinetop as an equipment operator."

Rhoden said that during this era of time, a group of Baker County citizens banded together and convinced a young man, E. Ed Yarbrough from Taylor, to run for sheriff and clean up the bootlegging.

"I campaigned for him because I wanted to see things change. I wanted the county to be a place you could raise your family because it had become a bad place. Just about everyone in the county was involved in one way or another.



**Baker County Deputy Sheriff, G.W. Rhoden standing, and State Trooper L.B. Boyette examine truck used to make moonshine**

"When Ed got elected he asked me to go to work for him. I did, and, buddy, we went to work, and we really cleaned it up. There was a lot of my friends who were bootlegging, people I loved and respected. I went to a lot of 'em and told 'em, 'You better quit 'cause we are going to stop this bootlegging.' Ed went to them, too. He even sent me to see 'em and tell 'em if they didn't do like they ought to we were going to catch 'em, and we did. We gave them a certain amount of time. He knew them well and had gone to school with many of them all of his life.

"Well, they didn't just about do it, you'd just about have to catch 'em. I caught a lot of my friends, I shore did, and they're still my friends. When I caught them they knew me, and they respected me for doing what I was sworn in to do and they respected me 'cause if I caught 'em they didn't get mad. A lot of 'em went to jail, a lot of 'em!"

Rhoden said catching the bootleggers wasn't that big of a job.

"They started reporting on one another. We'd get calls to the sheriff's office sometime and the person would say, 'There's a still down yonder at so and so's,' but you'd never know who called. Somebody would get mad with you cause you wouldn't do like they wanted and they'd turn you in. They'd think we went and found the still on our own, but we didn't," he said.

"People in the county were tired of it and how it had gotten out of hand. They helped us do it by being an informer. There was no more loyalty like the old days.

"We'd go on stake–outs some times at night. Mosquitoes were awful. We'd lay out for days trying to catch 'em. A Baker County native from Taylor was a state beverage agent and he'd get us to go with him a lot of times when he didn't have enough help. We'd get in the car about two or three o'clock in the morning. One person would be driving while the rest of us would lay down in the car. The agent would let us out on a grassy road to hide our tracks and sometimes we would lay out for weeks like that trying to catch 'em. We'd take food with us to eat. And back then we didn't have nothing to put on for the mosquitos and they'd eat us alive.

"The most exciting part was the chase after they had made the shine and were moving it to sale. They'd usually outrun us because they really had fast cars. Local people could rebuild their cars for higher speeds

and we just couldn't catch them because of it. Ed ordered me a fast one that was supposed to keep up with theirs, but they would even outrun it.

"When I went to work for Ed I knew everybody in this county, just about it, where he lived and where he worked, what kind of car he drove and all like that. You knew when a stranger came to town and if a fellow was a bootlegger you knew that too," he said.

"Ed Yarbrough was a good sheriff because when he took office he done what he said he would do. We broke up gambling, too, and that's where I got into trouble one Sunday morning. I had to shoot a fellow. They had gambled all night and they broke up in the morning about 7 a.m. They got into a fight up there in Margaretta and one fellow shot another. I was on duty that morning and I got a call to go to this bar.

"When I drove up there a fellow walked up to me and said there's a fellow back there that has shot a fellow and they done took him to the hospital. He said the man that shot him was in the back, so I pulled my car around to the back and when I got around there he went to shooting at me and shot 11 times and me sitting in the car. One shot took out the vent glass where I was sitting. I got out of the car and started shooting. I shot five times and he was standing back of a car. I hit the car with all five bullets and then he stuck his head out from behind the tire and I shot again and that was all my bullets. I reloaded and shot again and this time I hit him with my 7th shot. He meant to kill me. He was from Chicago and about 30 years old.

"That was the only fellow I had to kill. I felt bad about it until one day Mr. Brinkley, the mortician, told me that this guy's dad had called. Brinkley told me he asked him if he would call me and give me his regards and say that I had killed one of the meanest men that has ever lived. He said, 'Tell that guy that had to kill him not to feel bad about it because he meant to kill him.' My shot had hit him right side of the head, but I had to kill him or be killed. I wouldn't go back through all that mess again, nooooooooooo.

"I enjoyed it while I did it, breaking those bootleggers up and all. I'd been through it and I knew what it was because I was an old bootlegger myself. But I knew we had to catch 'em. After Ed left office, I stayed on working under each sheriff, except for a term with the city police force as chief, until I retired with Sheriff Joe Newmans on February 2, 1979. By

the time Joe took over there was hardly no bootlegging going on. Sugar got so high that you could buy bonded liquor about as cheep as bootleg whiskey, so in a way it actually put itself out of business.

"I admit I loved it so good that I worked seven days a week, I wanted to break it up so bad. I'd actually get so tired that I'd pull off the road and back up in a place and lay my head back to rest about 10 minutes, then I'd get up and go again. I'd be gone for 24 hours at a time. We worked 12 hour shifts, me and Wilber Mobley. Ed only had two deputies at first, then Eddie Nettles came on with us. One of the Florida Highway Patrolman, L.B. Boyette, loved it like me. He came in here and helped us. We'd catch some of my best friends, people I'd known all my life.

"One night we caught one of these hot rod cars that had 50 five gallon jugs on that one car. Now that's 250 gallons of shine. He didn't have but one seat in the car, and that's where he sat. The rest was for liquor."

Rhoden said the quality of moonshine declined and didn't measure up to when his dad made it.

"No it didn't measure up at all. Me and daddy made good shine, real clean in nice wooden barrels, copper and rye. Now that was real drinking whiskey, real good shine, better than you could buy. It was so clean because we'd wash the jugs spotless and then we'd take cotton and put it in a funnel and strain every bit of that whiskey to where we couldn't tell if the jugs were empty or full, the shine would be so clear.

"People started making it out of these old steel vats, and that's what poisoned and killed people at one time. They got to using yeast to make the shine work off faster and using old grain like corn and all that kind of stuff. And it just got to where it wasn't fittin' to drink. I've seen a bunch of rats floating in it. Old hogs and cows would come around and drink out of it and get drunk. I've seen hogs so drunk they couldn't even walk.

"Me and daddy covered our liquor barrels and would tie something around it so the rats couldn't get in it. Moonshining in our day was hard. We had to pump water from a hand pump or get it from the creek in buckets and haul it to the still. We had to gather old lightered knots to get something to burn to cook it with, you see. After the war, there were kerosene and gas available and that's when it got out of hand.

"Way back yonder it was hard times, really hard work, handling 100–pound bags of sugar, trying to sell it, hoping you would before the still

got tore up. We were really helped through those hard days by Junior Crockett, he was good, he was loyal and he was honest with us. But another kind of men came along and...well...times got terrible. I'm glad it got broken up.

"People got to making two to three hundred vats a night out of those big stills. It just wasn't good whiskey, not when you're trying to make 50 barrels at a time and putting it in old tin cans. That's the kind of bootleggers we were putting out of business. We've had that old jail so full, but they'd be so nice you could let them roam out in the yard, they wouldn't go nowhere. So, many of them had to go to prison. They were all serving time in prison together."

Today, G.W. Rhoden lives a quieter life with his wife, the former Evelyn Rhoden. His first marriage ended in divorce in 1967. He and Evelyn travel in their RV and spend many peaceful hours in the solitude of the North Carolina mountains, or by some peaceful stream where they fish and enjoy a more tranquil life. He has maintained his friendship with those he knew when he worked both sides of the law and the admiration and respect he acquired serves as his best testimony to the devotion and loyalty he gave to each side.

* * *

G.W. Rhoden died after a short illness on Sunday, March 26, 1995, from cancer. I spoke with G.W. just before his death and he expressed his desire to live long enough to see this book come out, but that was not possible. He was anxious to read the experiences of others, all of whom he knew well. I wish this had been possible because many whose stories appear in this volume have expressed their fondness and respect for G.W. in their individual stories.

Although he had not been feeling well for months, G.W.'s fatal illness took everyone by surprise. He was one of those rare individuals that everyone seemed to like and relate to. His friends were many and after keeping a daily vigil, they honored him by their presence at his funeral services, held at the Primitive Baptist Church in Glen St. Mary on Tuesday, March 28th. He was buried in Oak Grove Cemetery north of Macclenny.

# Lee B. 'L.B.' Boyette

## Former Florida Highway Patrol State Trooper
## The Way it was...in Baker County as remembered

**by L.B. Boyette 1995**

*"I really had a lot of respect for those Baker County boys, and they did me. I just loved the chase. The bootleggers were decent people. It's hard for some people to understand, unless you were there. It wasn't that they wanted to beat the law, or be on the outside of the law, but it was pretty much a livelihood."*

Trooper L. B. Boyette

L.B. Boyette, former Florida Highway Patrol Trooper, is one of those persons you like immediately. At least I did. In the mid 1950s, when I first met him, the FHP had a limited number of troopers stationed throughout Florida. My husband, Vince, and L.B. were stationed together in Baker County for a period of time in the '50s. I knew from first-hand experience that their commanding officers were hard-nosed, go-by-the-book sort of men. Their duty and allegiance was expected to be to the FHP, and some commanding officers went so far as to instill in the men that their job came before their family. Therefore, the men were completely in tune to keeping the letter of the law with all I's dotted and all T's crossed.



**Florida Highway Patrol Trooper L.B. Boyette**



**Florida Highway Patrol Director on left, Eldridge Beach and Trooper L.B. Boyette**

In those early days of the FHP, the troopers knew there would be immediate dismissal for the slightest infraction. They were keenly aware of the numerous men waiting anxiously in line for openings on the FHP, should they be dismissed. So once on the 'road,' in their personal, waxed–and–polished, black–and–gold FHP car, the troopers went to work with their wide brim Stetson hats, shiny service revolver, and most importantly, their rules and regulation 'book.' They were expected to 'go get em' with unwavering integrity.

It was here in Baker County where troopers like L.B. and my husband, Vince, learned a lesson in the honor of humanity. It's hard to explain, but most of those on the outside of the law, making illegal whiskey, set up a set of competitive rules between them and the law that they theorized to be a respectable 'fair contest.' The bootleggers didn't ask, or expect, the troopers to break the law for them, but they considered their terms 'fair play' and steadfastly expected the troopers to heed.

In L.B.'s story, you will see how this worked. Both the troopers and the bootleggers tried to outsmart the other in a game of fair play. When the bootleggers were 'fairly' apprehended, the respect between them remained, even as they were captured and ofttimes sent away to prison. L.B. has put this kind of experience into his own words in this, his story.

"I grew up in rural Suwannee County near the Wellborn and White Springs, Florida, much the same as many who lived and grew up in Baker County.

"The only experience with moonshine during these years was from my grandfather who, after grinding sugar cane and making syrup

in the fall each year, would save the 'skimmings.' After they fermented for awhile, he would distill them into moonshine, maybe yielding two or three gallons. He used this as a medicine for himself, his family and of course, us children.

"Upon graduating from the Florida Highway Patrol Academy in September of 1956, and a month of on-the-job-training with Trooper Jesse Lovett in the Lake City area, I was assigned to Baker County under the watchful eye and much-needed training of Trooper Vince Smallwood.

"Not long after this, I came in contact with my first real, dedicated bootlegger, in the person of A.J. Hodge. I had heard about him from other officers -- how wild, reckless and daring he was. I sort of admired him, you know, like an old west outlaw...not really bad, just, wild, full of life and recklessness.

"Then one day I was on duty in the Sanderson area. At this time, I was parked under two oak trees, a favorite observation point of mine near the Sanderson overpass and S curve, watching traffic. A.J. came along traveling west on U.S. 90, driving about 30 miles per hour. He went down to Hoss Keller's store, made a U-turn with his souped-up Chrysler, and by the time he went the short distance back to me he was traveling about 80 mph. Needless to say, the race was on.

"He had to slow down slightly to make the S-curve over the overpass, which gave me a chance to get my 1956 Ford up to his speed. We went to Glen St. Mary, turned north on 125, took the dirt road about two miles north of town there that runs by Bob Burnsed's house, and went back and forth on most of the roads in that area, pawing up the ground in dust and dirt, sliding and skidding. Finally I lost him up in the Taylor School area.

"The next day, I found A.J. at a service station in Glen. I arrested him for speeding and reckless driving.

"This, I found out later, was considered unfair and a violation of the 'Rules of the Game,' which was, if the bootlegger outran you, or got away, you were supposed to let him go. He had won the game. I never saw it as a game.

"Maybe that's why A.J. never liked me. We had other run-ins later on, some more serious than a traffic violation.

"And from this time on, there were many wild chases, mostly bootleggers and individuals in the liquor business trying out the new trooper to see if he could drive good enough to catch them or had the ability to out–drive them.

"I remember one morning just about day break. I was traveling north of Glen St. Mary on Hwy 125 out between the Blue Moon Juke Joint and Taylor. I came up behind a two–ton Ford truck loaded with all sorts of distilling equipment. I pulled alongside and signaled for the driver to stop. Instead of him stopping, he just turned off into the woods...no road...no trail, just woods! Back and forth, around trees, through bushes, we went....me following in his ruts in the Highway Patrol car, blowing the siren and flashing the red lights. He paid very little attention to that and kept going.

"Finally, the truck became struck in mud near a pond. The driver got out and ran on foot. I chased him until I was exhausted. I returned to my patrol vehicle and called the state officers, who came and seized the truck. It had sugar, gas cylinders, a water pump, condenser and other distilling equipment on it.

"During the foot race, my service revolver fell out of my holster. While other officers seized and removed the liquor truck, I searched for my gun. Man, I had to find it. Since I was relatively new on the job, I felt my sergeant would never understand this...and since I was still on probation I could even get fired, but I never found the gun.

"I went back to my car, drove back through the mud and trees to Hwy 125 and headed south toward Glen, trying to decide how to tell my training officer, Smallwood, about the pistol. I was tired and aggravated and worried about my gun.

"Two or three miles down the road, I saw a muddy, wet, young fellow sitting on the shoulder of Hwy 125. He waved for me to stop. I did and he walked over to the passenger side of the car and got in. He said, 'I'm Harold Combs. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out my shiny handgun and said, 'You might need this sometime. There's a bunch of mean people in this county. I found it back there in the woods.' Then he said, 'I need a ride to Taylor, can you take me up there?'. I took him to Taylor.

"Sometime later, Harold, Glen Johnson, and Catfish Stokes were in one of these hot-rod Chryslers going to Macclenny and they were involved in an accident just west of Glen on US 90 and Harold was killed. The scars are still visible on the Black-gum tree today that they hit 37 years ago.

"In January 1957, Ed Yarborough took office as sheriff of Baker County. Wilber Mobley was his first deputy, and later on, G.W. Rhoden joined the force. This really signaled the end of the big business of bootlegging in Baker County. As Sheriff Yarborough turned up the heat, the bootleggers became more shifty; many moved their operations outside of Sheriff Yarborough's jurisdiction. Many moved over into the Georgia Bend area.

"One of Sheriff Yarborough's campaign promises when he ran for sheriff was that the bootleggers of Baker County were going to have to change their occupations or move. He went about keeping this promise. They didn't quit the operation, they just moved it. Sheriff Yarborough made it pretty hot for them. There was lots of whiskey still made and transported through Baker County by persistent violators, but they had a formidable force against them, one they hadn't been used to dealing with. But the handwriting was on the wall and it cut the liquor business way down.

"One persistent group who lived in Baker County was Lloyd Rhoden in the Baxter area. Lloyd liked big, black, shiny Chrysler cars. He wanted them to look good and run fast and they did. These cars would run fast and carry large loads of bootleg whiskey, 250-300 gallons at a trip. These vehicles would run well over a hundred miles per hour, even fully loaded with whiskey.

"A favorite route for transporting whiskey was Georgia Hwy 94 and Florida Highway Number 2 through Baker County. This route started in the Georgia Bend area as Georgia Highway 94. When Hwy 94 reached the Florida State line in northeast Baker County, it became Florida State Road 2, continued for about 20 miles through Baker County and the southern end of the Okefenokee Swamp, then back into Georgia again as Georgia Hwy 94. This vast forested area was away from almost everything except alligators, bears, panthers and such who made this their

home where the famed Suwannee River headwaters were. Ideal country for moonshining.

"The Rhoden group included two prominent drivers for his transporting vehicles – – Jimmy and Junior Lyons, who were brothers. These two know only three things about driving: 'Leave spinning the wheels and come back sliding them, and in between wide open as a lot gate.' They didn't know what the speed limit was, they evidently couldn't read them signs. This kept them in hot water with us.

"These vehicles this group used were usually 1952 Dodges, 1954–65 Chrysler New Yorkers. The insides of these vehicles were gutted to give a large open cargo space. Only a driver's seat remained inside; the rest of the car was where they could stack liquor. The engine was something else. They were redesigned and souped up. Most had the famed Chrysler Hemin Engine, two four–barrel carburetors and a super full racing cam, which back then was very popular and the top of the line. They were equipped with two fuel pumps, one the regular vacuum pump and an electric fuel pump. These vehicles were designed and maintained by Sand's garage in Macclenny, just north of the center of town on Hwy 23, now redesignated as Hwy 121. I imagine Mr. Sands is still around. I might ought to get him to fix me a hot–rod car sometime. He knew what to do with them.

"The Rhoden group's routine was mostly as follows: The whiskey was manufactured in the Georgia Bend area, or collected and stored there, then loaded onto one of these special Chrysler cars and then stashed in Georgia, near the Florida line off Hwy 94. A second special Chrysler was loaded with five gallon cans of high–test gas and hid along with the liquor–transport Chrysler.

"A third souped–up car, usually driven by Lloyd Rhoden himself, with Jimmy and Junior Lyons, would make a 'dry run' through Florida on State Road 2 to see if the way was clear of revenuers, deputies or troopers that would give them any static later on. The dry run would start on Ga. 94 at about 100 miles per hour, travel through Florida on SR 2, and enter again into Georgia on Hwy 94. If no law challenged them during this high speed run, the three would turn around and travel back very slow using spot lights to check the entire 20–mile section of SR 2 for any suspicious signs or evidence that officers may be

concealed along this route. This ritual may have been repeated several times during the night before they'd take a chance on bringing the liquor cars out.

"If the group was satisfied that the area was safe, then Jimmy, Junior and Lloyd would return to the hidden liquor car and gas car.

"The reason for three vehicles was because the souped–up Chryslers used large amounts of gas at high speed. The gas car doubled as an escort and to supply gas enroute. They couldn't take a chance on stopping at service stations because it was 'too easy to block a stopped car.' Also, if perchance, the moonshine car was challenged or detected, the escort car would try to entice the challenger to chase him, giving the whiskey vehicle a chance to get through. The third Chrysler would bring up the rear. His purpose was to aid the other two if car problems developed and if the driver of the liquor car had to ditch the whiskey he could pick up the driver later so he wouldn't have to spend the night in the woods.

"The one exception to this ritual was through Florida on SR 2. On this road they had learned that they most likely would be challenged. So, the procedure was to cross the Florida line running about 100 mph and outrun Trooper Boyette and deputy Rhoden and get back into the relative safety of secluded backwoods Georgia and go on to their final destination, the western part of north Florida. This was their routine.

"This was my routine: After putting in 10–12 hours of relatively routine road patrol, promoting safety, spreading peace and goodwill as dictated by Florida Highway Patrol Captain Hagan, Lt. G.B. Stafford, Sgt. Crawford and Corp. Carrol, about sundown I would eat supper, usually at Walter's Truck Stop, and gas up my patrol car, including two or three extra five–gallon cans of gas I put in the trunk. Then, after good dark, I'd start surreptitiously working my way to Fla SR 2. Most of the time I would travel Hwy 125 north out of Glen to Taylor, then a dirt road to Hwy 2 near the Eddy Fire Tower. Here I would drive up on the pavement, stop, and take a broom from the trunk and sweep any dirt left by my tires from the pavement. This was to prevent Lloyd, Jimmy and Junior from seeing my tire signs and knowing I was around.

"From the Eddy Road, I would travel east toward Baxter to a hiding place about one half mile west of where Hwy 2 crossed a lone set of railroad tracks. Here I could get on and off SR 2 without getting stuck in mud and also a nice place to hide the conspicuous black and yellow patrol car. Here I would back into the woods, cover my car with a couple of dark brown blankets and break off Myrtle bushes and cover it all up. Then, I'd take the broom and sweep the grass that I had mashed down driving off the pavement, thus removing any detectable signs.

"Then I would walk back to the edge of the woods and wait.

"Sometimes it would be just a few minutes, sometimes it would be several hours. Sometimes, on rare occasions it wouldn't happen at all that night. I used to sit there a lot of hours. During my wait at this site, an occasional car would pass, maybe a truck, but mostly it was just the sound of night characteristics in this part of Baker County –– the bellowing of an alligator, the hoot of a great horned owl, once in a while the cry of a Florida panther and, of course, the hum of a few million mosquitoes.

"Then I would hear it! The distant sound that I was waiting for! The one that always created excitement. The excitement would build. This sound I'm referring to was the whining of tires of a vehicle on pavement traveling at a high speed and the roar of a powerful engine as it sucked in great quantities of air though two four–barrel carburetors. This sound was characteristic only of the vehicles used by Lloyd and his group.

"About five miles from the Florida line on the Baxter side, SR 2 crossed a set of railroad tracks. There was a slight elevation of the road over the tracks, which wasn't noticeable at regular speeds, but at a high speed a vehicle tended to leave the pavement for a split second. This momentary clear of the tires from the pavement made a difference in the sound of the vehicle when it crossed the railroad track. It was a distinct break in the whining of the tires, like a swoop. If the vehicle was empty there was an interception of the whining tires. If the vehicle was loaded there was a detectable different sound. From the sound of a speeding vehicle as it crossed the tracks, I could tell if it was loaded or empty as the vehicle crossed these tracks and rounded a slight curve west of the railroad as the lights

came into view. This was one of the things that let me know when to start the actual race.

"When the time came...a single car traveling about 100 mph....Lloyd's Chrysler making a 'dry run' trying to entice me out of hiding, I just watched as the tail lights faded from view as it continued northwest on SR 2. About 30 minutes later I'd see lights coming from the northwest toward me at a very slow speed, shining spotlights out both windows, as they traveled south looking for G.W. or me, or any other officers who might be hid off SR–2.

"Lloyd, Jimmy and Junior would pass my position, continue south on SR 2 and disappear from view. About 30 minutes later, that sound again...the whining tire and bellowing engine. First, the escort car with gas running about a hundred mph. About one quarter mile behind, the liquor car, loaded, running about 100 mph. After the liquor car, about one half mile back, Lloyd brings up the rear.

"When the escort car passed my position, I would uncover my patrol car and ready myself for the race. As the transport vehicle passed, I would pull in behind him with my lights off, close the distance between his and my vehicle as much as I could before being detected; sometimes this would be less than a car length between us. Here we go running over a hundred mph, me with no lights.

"Then I turn my bright lights on, start the siren and red lights. That's when the race really got started, mile after mile on Thunder Road.

"My patrol car, usually a Ford, would run about 125–130 mph. Their supped–up Chrysler would do 135–140 mph. With this speed advantage over me, most chases ended in their gaining enough distance over a 20–30 mile race between me and them for them to turn off and hide until I had to leave the area. About the only thing I could do was tuck my tail between my legs and come on back to Macclenny. The fun was over for that night. Occasionally I could get lucky and catch one, but most of the time they got away. I know the good Lord had to be looking out for me and them during those years. At those speeds we could have flown out over the Okefenokee Swamp and nobody would have ever found us out there and the alligators would have eat us.

"This was a ritual that occurred almost weekly for three or four years with me, G.W. and the Lyons brothers and Lloyd Rhoden.

"After Sheriff Yarborough took office and G.W. joined the force, he and I spent most of our time working together, especially after our regular shift was over. We spent many days and nights looking for distillers, chasing and catching moonshiners, and trying to cause them as much trouble as we could. But we were having fun, we enjoyed that. G.W. was a good fellow to work with and taught me not only much about law enforcement, but more important, how to deal with people. G.W. was one of the few natural-born law enforcement officers I've known. Baker County made a mistake when they failed to elect him as their sheriff, and keep him until he was 99.

"Those bootleggers had pretty much unlimited capital to 'soup' those cars up and we troopers could only do as much as the state would authorize us to do, and I couldn't do anything to my FHP car to soup it up.

"When I left the FHP in 1961 I took a job with the State Beverage Department, thinking by doing that I could run the moonshiners full time. The FHP got to where they were hassling me about spending so much time running the bootleggers, but in Baker County you had to do it. In 1961, I was stationed with the SBD in Live Oak. I stayed with them until 1966, when I went with the Federal Agency in July 1966. They stationed me in Dublin, Georgia. That area was much more active than in Florida, but it wasn't the same thing. In Baker County it was, more or less, hot-rod cars and races and most all our times were spent in the woods.

"There was really a mutual respect among us. They knew that if I caught them, then they were caught. I'd never lie on one of them, or pull stuff on them that would cause them to get hurt like blocks in the roads, or logs, like some people I know. They wouldn't do me that way and I never would have done them that way. It was sorta' like a game, they'd do their best to get away from me and I'd do my best to catch them, and that was the way it was.

"I really had a lot of respect for those Baker County boys, and they did me. I just loved the chase. The bootleggers were decent people. They were people who operated in what we refer to as the shady

areas. There was a respect for each side. It's hard for some people to understand unless you were there. It was really just a way of life for them. It wasn't that they wanted to beat the law, or be on the outside of the law, but it was pretty much a livelihood. Of course, it eventually got out of hand, but they were not criminals; it was making a living, not beating the law with them. There just wasn't much employment in Baker County and it was a profitable situation for them. It's like one of them told me one time. He said, 'You know, I don't have to have any education to make this. If I go to get a job, the first thing they ask is how long I went to school and how high was my education. They want to pay me $3 a day, and want me to work from seven in the morning until seven at night, so I can do this from seven to seven and make a good living.'

"He ended his work experiences on a personal note with these comments that are very special to me and Vince:

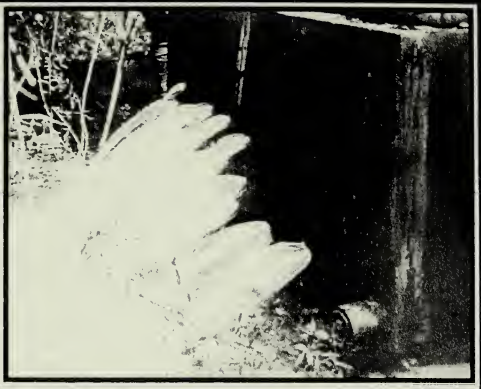
"There are many more episodes that occurred during my five-year stay in Baker County, some to do with work, some to do with my personal life. Starting in my first employment there, I owe a great deal to many citizens of Baker County, most of all I'm indebted to Trooper Vince Smallwood for his tolerance, assistance, and understanding and friendship during those rookie years and beyond.

"To you La Viece, you introduced me to Patsy, and we have a beautiful family because of you. Two beautiful daughters, two fine sons, two great sons-in-law, two great daughters-in-law, and seven grand children. You did me a favor far beyond my capacity to repay you and I often think about it."

L.B. retired in 1985. Today he enjoys a life of farming north of Winston Salem, North Carolina, near the Virginia state line. His lovely wife, Patsy, is the daughter of Baker County pioneers, the late Ervin and Eva Davis of Sanderson.



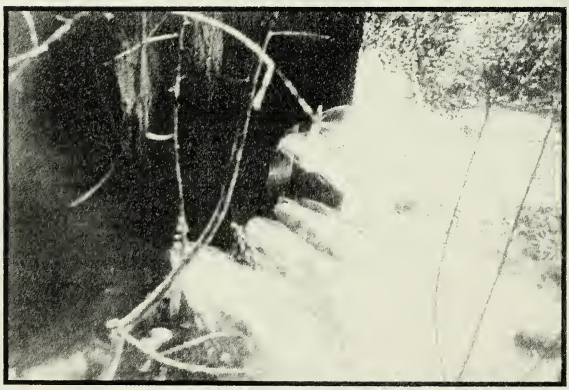
Sheriff Paul Thrift
1966-1972



Baker County Moonshine
spewing from raided still

Sheriff Paul Thrift
at Baker County
Moonshine still





Moonshine
pouring
from raided
Baker County
Moonshine still

# Paul Thrift
## Sheriff of Baker County
### 1966–1972

*"I knew there were a few of them stills left out there in the woods, but me, nor my deputy, had time to go out searching for them."*

**former Baker County Sheriff Paul Thrift**



**Paul Thrift**
**Former Sheriff of Baker County**

Paul Thrift was one of 12 children born to a Georgia Bend couple, Jode and Caroline Raulerson Thrift. While most families in the area produced moonshine to make a scant living, his family plowed the fields and planted their crops from sun–up to sun–down, grubbing their livelihood.

Paul drove a school bus for $7 a month that enabled him to obtain a coveted high school education in St. George, Ga. In 1939 he and his brother Lonnie opened a small general grocery store in Moniac. Moonshiners in the area often purchased their supplies from the store, such as corks for the moonshine jugs, or sugar and rye to make the brew.

"It was rough going for all of us," he said, remembering the by–gone days of neighborly guardianship.

"When a revenuer came around those woods, an alert went out among the neighbors, warning everyone who had a still to be cautious."

Thrift served for three years in the European Theatre during WW II, seeing action in Africa, Sicily, Italy and Germany. Upon his return to the USA, he came back to Baker County and in November. 1945. married pretty Willa Mae Johns of Taylor, whom he met for the first time at a social gathering at the Baker County Community Center.

"We had lived across the river from each other all of our lives and never met, because she was on the Florida side and I was on the Georgia side," he said.

The couple moved to Macclenny in 1946, settling down in a modest bungalow on north 228 where they reared their three children, Timmy, Paula and Joey. Baker County housemover Will Gilbert moved the little country store for the brothers from Georgia to Macclenny, where they operated the convenience store business together for many years. Gilbert also moved the wood-frame house of Lonnie and his wife, Bea, onto the approximately two-acre plot of land back of the store. It is now occupied by Paul and Willa Mae.

"The store kept us real busy and we stayed open for the public 6 1/2 days a week. We only closed at noon on Sundays," he said.

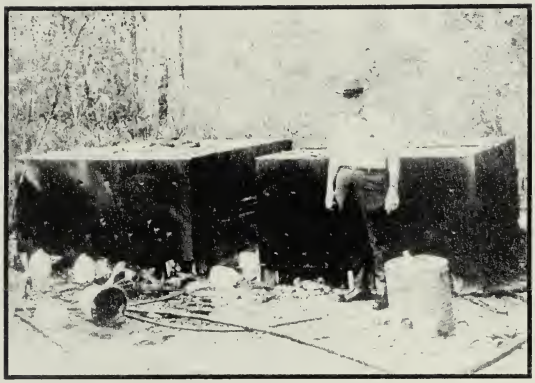
After a time, his brother Lonnie bought out Blair's Hardware Store. Paul successfully continued in the convenience store business. He eventually became interested in politics and was elected and served first on the City Commission and later on the County Commission. From 1966 to 1972 he served as sheriff.

Thrift holds the distinction of being the first Baker County sheriff to hire a black deputy. His name was Frank Smith.

When Thrift took office in 1966, his beginning salary was $12,000 annually. "Now, it's better than $70,000," he said, shaking his head in amazement.

The man who rose from backwoods poverty to one of the most successful and respected men in the community now sits back in his retirement years and quietly recalls those days.

"Moonshine was pretty much cleaned up by the time I took office," he said, in his cautious manner. "I knew there were a



**Sheriff Paul Thrift at Baker County Moonshine still**

few stills left out there in the woods, but me, nor my deputies, had the time to go out searching for them. If the state or federal agents alerted us that they had found a still and was going to raid it, then I'd go with them and help them destroy it. I never knew who they belonged to, but we all worked together.

"During my years as sheriff, bootlegging was not as prevalent as it had been in previous years. This was due in part to state–enforced regulations on the purchasing and distribution of the raw materials needed to produce the moonshine, such as sugar, rye, yeast, syrup, and so forth.

"As sheriff, I cooperated with both the state and federal agencies to terminate the bootlegging that did exist in Baker County. But 1966–1972 was an era of transition from bootlegging to the illegal growth and sale of marijuana," he said.

Today, the couple finds great enjoyment in their three outstanding children and four grandchildren who live near by.

Daughter Paula, a former Baker County Teacher of The Year and recipient of the Ruth I. Shuler Teaching Award, is now Director of Family Services for the Baker County School System.

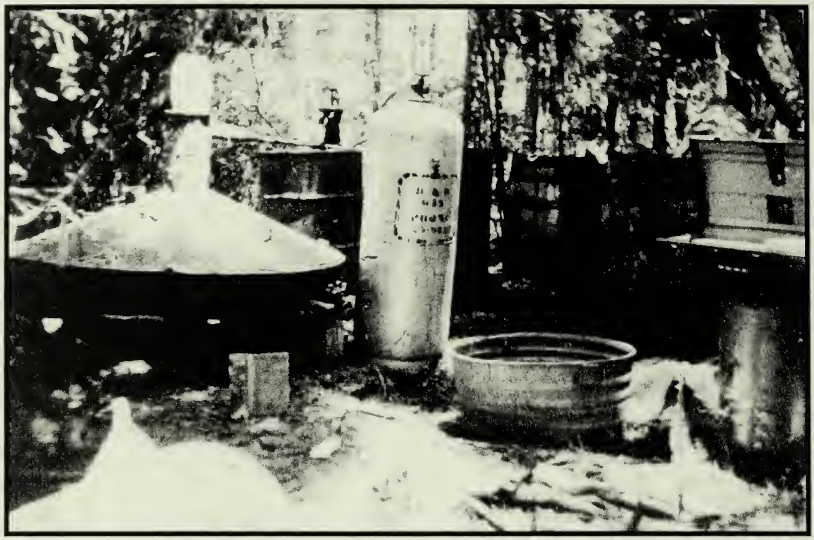
Son Timmy, who has taught World History at Baker County High School for 18 years, has been honored twice as Baker County Teacher of the Year. Twice, he has received the coveted Ruth I. Shuler Teaching Award.

Their youngest son, Joey, owns and operates a successful sawmill on north 121.

The quiet and gentile man has lived through the primitive pioneering days of Charlton and Baker Counties into the Space Age era, but for him, little has changed. He still believes strongly in the

human value system and being supportive of family and friends when essential to meet the needs of mankind.

And that's how it was in the moonshine days when he was sheriff of Baker County.



**Copper still, barrels of Moonshine confiscated at Baker County Moonshine still**

# Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Z. Vincent Smallwood

*"That was one of the most disappointing times of my life, when the jury came back and announced their verdict, finding the defendant NOT GUILTY!"*

**Vince Smallwood**

*"Although I have had the occasion to arrest and take to jail many of the moonshine car drivers, I have found the majority of them to be honest people who would not deliberately hurt anyone. They would not consciously tell you a lie, except if you asked about their moonshine activities."*

**Vince Smallwood**



**Trooper Vince Smallwood**

"Like all of us who live, or who have lived in Baker County, our lives were affected in some way by the moonshine industry that existed in North Florida and South Georgia. In the 1950's, my life was no exception.

"When I began my career as a rookie Florida Highway Patrol Trooper in 1953, my first assignment was in adjoining Duval County under the in–service training of veteran

Trooper Al King. At the time, the FHP statewide force of troopers only consisted of about 275 men. We worked 12-hour shifts, six days a week for a $275 monthly salary. That was pretty good money in those days.

"Having been born and reared in the small community of Gulf Hammock, in Levy County, I felt proud of my position as a law enforcement officer, and considered myself ready to carry out any of my assignments to the letter of the law. That was my feeling on an autumn afternoon two weeks after being assigned, as I was riding 'shotgun' (right front passenger seat) with my training officer, Veteran Trooper Al King. Beginning with this experience, the expertise of Trooper King, who was a very competent and skilled senior companion and trainer, no doubt helped to save my life many times after I was assigned to patrol duty by myself.

"As we rode along that afternoon in Trooper King's Ford cruiser, we received a report from Georgia authorities that two Baker County moonshine runners had escaped on foot after wrecking their shine car in a high-speed chase. We were informed the duo had stolen a 1955 maroon Mercury from a Georgia resident who lived near the location where the accident occurred.

"We were about five miles north of Baldwin when we were notified by the Baldwin Police Chief that these two suspects in the stolen Mercury had just outrun him, and were heading north toward our position. I could feel my Adrenalin start to build as I intuitively felt that this was going to be my first real high-speed chase. As we saw the maroon car approaching over the horizon of a long straight stretch of highway, Trooper King boldly backed his Ford cruiser across the highway, blocking their path. The Mercury continued toward us at speeds of 110-115 miles per hour, without slowing down. The driver hit the shoulder of the road and went around us on the grass and somehow managed to maintain control of his vehicle. He proceeded north toward Callahan, wide open, with Trooper King and I in hot pursuit.

"Fortunately, our patrol car was faster than their car and we were able to overtake them within seven or eight miles. They refused to stop and after running us in the ditch several times they turned on a

dirt road and headed west out of Bryceville toward the Georgia Bend, still reaching speeds up to 100 mph.

"As we pulled the FHP cruiser alongside of their car, they deliberately rammed us. My training officer instructed me to shoot out their rear tire with my .30–caliber carbine.

"I leaned out the right front window, holding my rifle, and promptly got a face full of dirt from the spinning wheels of the high–speed vehicle a few feet ahead of us, and lost my newly issued FHP uniform Stetson hat to boot. There were two things that a trooper just didn't do. One was to lose your hat, the other your gun, and I had just done the first of these two 'no–nos' in less than two weeks on the job.

"We fell back to a distance of about 75 feet behind the vehicle and on the first shot, with a tight bead on the right rear tire, I fired and nothing happened. I fired again just as they crossed a bridge on the dirt road and the hood of their car flew up. Trooper King thought I had shot through the car and hit the hood latch but I assured him that I had shot very near the tire. The third shot took out the tire and the fleeing driver lost control and the vehicle went through the ditch into the woods. The two men in the front seat ran through the woods, and at this time we observed a third person who had been laying down on the rear seat or floor board. Trooper King instructed me to apprehend the car's passenger, while he chased the fleeing driver. We both lost the foot race and returned to the car only to discover that the 15–year–old girlfriend of one of the suspects was the rear seat passenger. Other than being so scared that she literally wet on herself, she was fine. We turned her over to the juvenile authorities and continued to look for the suspects who were still hiding in the woods.

"Trooper Carl Woodle came to assist us, and we requested assistance from a passing motorist in a pickup truck. By now it was dark and, being a moonless night, it was very dark, so Trooper King and I followed in the patrol car about 200 feet behind the pick– up with our headlights off, while Trooper Woodle stood in the back of the truck with his shotgun.

"As the pickup truck approached the location where the two suspects were suspected to be hiding in the woods, they both ran out and flagged the truck down in anticipation of getting a ride. As the

truck pulled along beside them and stopped, Trooper Woodle looked down the barrel of his shotgun and said, 'Want a ride, boys?' Surrounded, they were too surprised and too tired to run any further. It was all over now except for the paperwork.

"I learned many things from my training officer that day, among them, how to keep a cool head during a high-speed chase, how to drive at a high rate of speed on a dirt road, how to shoot straight, and that bootleggers were a serious force to be reckoned with. I also keenly observed the respectful manner in which he treated the offenders in spite of their actions.

"Over my 32 1/2 year career, I experienced many more high-speed chases, but none as memorable as that first one.

"In those days, we were tightly regulated by the FHP rules to remain on our assigned roads during our regular shift, but we were allowed to look for moonshine haulers after our shift was over as long as we maintained radio contact with the FHP station for our own safety.

"I soon learned that most of the high-speed vehicles we chased were decoy cars scouting out the highway before the loaded shine car appeared. The bootleggers were very foxy, and it became a respectable cat-and-mouse game between the law officer and moonshiner, if there is such a thing.

"A few months after being assigned to Duval County, I met, and married, my sweetheart of the last 40 years, and the author of this book, La Viece Moore. She grew up in Baker County and was a friend and classmate of many of the moonshiners who found the lure of quick-and-easy money in this occupation worth the risk they took each and every time they got behind the wheel of their vehicle to make a shine run.

"While living and working in Duval County, I was offered $150 a night to let moonshine cars go safely through my assigned territory. That was never a temptation, nor was it even a consideration for me, despite the financial struggle to make ends meet each month. I was never made this offer while I lived in Baker County.

"I was assigned by the FHP to Baker County in 1955, just about the time many citizens had realized that something had to be done to save the up-coming youth from involvement in the moonshine indus-

try. Laws were being changed, such as making possession of more than a gallon of moonshine a felony, and Baker Countians had encouraged a young man, E. Ed Yarbrough, to run for sheriff with a campaign promise to 'clean up the county of shine'.

"I've often wondered how our family life would have turned out had I accepted the offer from Sheriff Yarbrough, after his election, to become his deputy. Instead, I decided to continue my career with the FHP, which eventually moved us away to other territories and assignments. However, for the few years I was privileged to live in Baker County, I had my experiences with those who chose moonshine as their profession.

"One high-speed chase that came very near ending my life, or maiming me forever, began under the old oak tree on US 90 east of Sanderson.

"I saw a young man that I recognized come by in a late model Ford with all the earmarks of a loaded 'shine' car. He drove by me very much like a law-abiding citizen, and looked at me as we waved to each other. I instinctively pulled out, driving slowly behind him, and the chase was on. He turned down SR 127 south at a high rate of speed with me in close pursuit, siren wailing and emergency lights flashing. After several miles, he turned off into a long lane leading to a farmhouse, ran through the farmer's yard, and out another road, back onto the main road, then down numerous other unpaved roads in the area.

" My car was faster than his, and I had no problem catching up with him, but he continually tried to run me off the road as he steered into my lane.

"I decided to drop back behind him and wait as I had a full tank of gas. I noticed that he was making unusual crouching motions as he drove, but I couldn't figure out what he was doing, especially going at such a high rate of speed, up to and in excess of 100 m.p.h.

"I started to pull alongside him again, and in a split second I realized what he had been doing when a full five-gallon jug of moonshine came flying out his window and hit the road a few feet in front of my car. I swerved to the right just as the 3/4-inch-thick glass bottom of the broken five-gallon jug sailed like a cannon ball over my head missing my windshield directly in front of my face, missing me by inches.

"I knew this guy was different and that he would kill me if necessary to get away. This was the first time that I had become really angry with a bootlegger because this one was seriously and deliberately endangering my life, something you just didn't expect one of them to do.

"The chase continued and I stayed close on his bumper. It was difficult to see for the cloud of dust his car was raising. I vividly remember, to this day, when we drove across a cattlegap on the dirt road at about 85 miles per hour and hearing that bloop–bloop sound when the wheels of the car lost contact with the ground. He turned on to what is now Mud Lake Road. I couldn't see what was ahead of him for the dust cloud, so when he went around a curve at a T intersection, I just flew airborne across the road into the woods, where I miraculously went over, around, and in–between the stumps and trees in my path. Needless to say he was gone in a cloud of dust and not knowing if he had left me dead or alive.

"This is the only time I can recall when I was out–run by a moonshiner that I went an obtained an arrest warrant. The unwritten, but understood, rule between law officers and the moonshiner was, if they got away, then that was their good luck. If they didn't, then that was ours. But because he had deliberately jeopardized my life by throwing that jug of whiskey out in front of my car, and because I definitely knew his identity, I located his car the following morning, had it towed in, and got a warrant for his arrest.

"He elected to be tried by a Baker County jury on the charges of reckless driving, resisting arrest by fleeing a police officer, and assault against a police officer.

"The jury was made up of six people, most of whom were known by both the defendant and me. I testified, under oath, of the facts in the case, looking the defendant square in the eye.

"That was one of the most disappointing times in my life when the jury came back and announced their verdict, finding the defendant, NOT GUILTY!

"I later individually asked the two members of the jury that I personally knew (one was a county official and the other was a former high school classmate and very good friend of my wife) , if they would

tell me why they found the defendant not guilty. They both replied that they knew he was guilty, but, they said, 'He's a good old boy that didn't mean any harm. You were not hurt or killed. If we had found him guilty he may have been sentenced to jail time, and he's got a family to feed.'

"It was a long time before I forgave the two jurors for not doing their sworn duty and finally, after several years, I got to where I could chuckle about it.

"In retrospect, maybe-- in one way-- this was a good verdict, because this young man eventually got out of the shine hauling business and with the help of some dedicated state and county public officials obtained a good job and completed a highly successful career, and he is now enjoying retirement and is living an upright Christian life.

"Although I have had the occasion to arrest and take to jail many of the moonshine car drivers, I have found the majority of them to be honest people who would not deliberately hurt anyone. They would not consciously tell you a lie, except if you asked about their moonshine activities. I have had, on more than one occasion, got stuck after spinning out in a high-speed chase on remote dirt roads, only to be assisted later by the same driver who got away after he had gone home to change clothes and cars. Although we both knew that I knew who he was, neither of us mentioned anything about the incident before or after, other than to say, 'Thanks,' and, 'I'll see you around.'

While living in Macclenny, La Viece and I introduced three other Florida Highway Troopers to Baker County girls who later wed. Trooper Kenneth Boatright married La Viece's classmate, Carolyn Barton of Macclenny; Trooper Ray Adkins married her cousin, Carolyn Jones of Pine Top, and Trooper L.B. Boyette, who has his own story in this book, married her friend, Patsy Davis from Sanderson. Except for Ray Adkins, who died, ending Carolyn's marriage, the rest of our marriages have lasted for the past 40 years.

I was promoted and transferred and moved to Orange County in December of 1958, and left behind all traces of the moonshine era when I went into the safety division of the FHP. I suppose that the best lesson that I learned in the moonshine era of Baker County, other than

how it feels to win or lose and to be a good loser as well as a good winner, was although the bootleggers and I were on opposite sides of the law, we both share one thing in common....mutual respect for each other!

After having lived away for 25 years, we returned to Baker County in 1984, and I retired the following year after a successful career in law enforcement. One day, not long after we moved back, I received a quart of the best homemade syrup, yep syrup, not moonshine, that could possibly be made. It was from a former moonshiner, and someone I consider my friend. Well, after all these years, I found that it really wasn't a sticky situation after all!

Major Vince Smallwood, FHP Retired



# E. ED Yarbrough

## Sheriff, Baker County, 1956–1965
## Interview – October 1994

*"That night I told the group, now if you've picked me because you think I'm going to catch your friend and you are going to want me to turn him loose, then you have picked the wrong candidate."*

*"I had to sell the program just like I would malaria or hookworms. I had to come up with an antidote. I'd tell them, 'I want you to look around at these little kids and think about it.' I'd say, 'Don't sell them out,' and they'd be real quiet, like they were thinking. Then I'd tell them to pray about it. I'd say, 'Don't sell these bright–eyed boys and girls out, give them a fair chance.' I'd tell them, 'I'm the man that can do it."*

*"I made an agreement with these boys before I got elected. I told them, 'Now if I touch you and tell you that you are under an arrest and you jerk loose and run, I'll just go get you after you get home, but if I don't ever catch you and you can ever out run me, then that's your good luck.' That was a gentlemen's agreement and they liked that. It was fair play."*

*"These bootleggers were smart."*



**Baker County Sheriff, E. Ed Yarbrough congratulated by Governor Haydon Burns on appointment to Florida's top law enforcement position**

It's possible that Ed Yarbrough was born swinging his fists. He grew up fighting. He loved it, but will tell you quickly that he doesn't pick fights. He simply defends himself. He once proudly owned a pair of boxing gloves when he was in Taylor School and was eager to take on anyone that was willing to fight him. The stage was his ring, the students the referee, Yarbrough the winner.

You either like Ed Yarbrough or you don't. There is seldom a middle of the

road opinion of the man who rose from backwoods obscurity to the highest prominence in Florida's law enforcement.

Growing up in rural Baker County, he was like the vast majority of young boys, traipsing to the antiquated moonshine still operation of his beloved father, standing on a stump or box to pump water, doing his part to make the 'shine that provided extra income so the family could survive.

He was one of 10 children born to David Arthur and Margaret "Maggie" Raulerson Yarbrough in the rural settlement of Taylor, Florida, on June 11, 1926.



**Margaret "Maggie" Isabel Raulerson**
**David Arthur Yarbrough**

At an early age he vied for leadership positions and won them in high school where he was a competent basketball player and served as his senior class president, before leaving to serve in the U.S. Fifth Air Force during WW II. Upon his return to Baker County, he took a 9–to–5 job with Standard Oil Company in Jacksonville where he quickly ascended to top ranks. Always seeking to learn and excel, he enrolled at Jones College for night classes. Then, as he steadily climbed the ladder of success, something bothered him greatly about his native home.

"I'd get kidded everywhere I went when people found out I was from Baker County. If I bought a new car they thought I was making extra money on the side from bootlegging. Baker County had a notorious reputation as the moonshine capitol of the nation."

"I had to wear a neck tie in the office where I worked, and when I'd come back to Macclenny in the afternoon I'd stop off by the pool room or one of the local bars. There would always be several of those bootleggers sitting at the counter laughing and carrying on. A tie was a 'no, no,' with these bootleggers, so one night one of the boys in the bar grabbed my tie and said, 'I think I'll cut that neck tie off', and I said, 'I think you better not,' and after we had a few words, he decided not to do it. It was attitudes like this that I just gradually became opposed to moonshine and its affect on the community. You see, during the time when my daddy,

and other farmers like him, bootlegged whiskey, it was for survival and on a real small scale. People started out by using the cane skimming and making just one or two barrels at a time. They used little old copper stills and used wood or coal to heat with. You could see a little smoke coming up at those sites all over the woods back in the '30s.

"Then, during the war, sugar was rationed and people started looking for sources to get syrup and started making shine and hauling it by the truck loads. The motive for making moonshine whiskey changed. It got to be so big they had to have another way of heating. Some of them used a burner which was a long pipe with holes all in it hooked up to a gas cylinder. You could hear that thing roaring 100 yards, it was like a factory.

"During my daddy's time, making moonshine was a misdemeanor, a tax evasion, and it was not considered a crime. When it got to the big time stuff, hauling it out by the semi loads, then it got dangerous. The law changed from a misdemeanor to a felony and if one gallon of moonshine was found in your possession it was considered a felony and the same thing if you got caught with any equipment. People began to resent it. A lot of young boys began to get involved because they could make quite a bit of money while they were going to school. It was very tempting for a boy; they had souped up automobiles to run 150 miles an hour. Most boys want to go fast when thy first learn how to drive.

"Some of those school boys would run a load of shine during the week and we lost one or two of them in tragic accidents. I remember one lady told me about observing two young boys playing on their tricycles one day. They were playing cops and robbers, and one of them said to the other, 'Get out of the way, I'm blankedy blank coming through with a load.' These people were becoming their heros. The town's people, and particularly the business people were getting more concerned about our reputation and a few of them began to form a committee to discuss ways to end the stigma.

"I got involved with the group and we began to organize a few things. We got the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Jacksonville to come out and organize one for us here in Baker County. I became the first president, and later was elected State Vice President. People like me and Vernon Walker would go to places like Daytona Beach for conventions and have a big time together. Soon we had a pretty big crowd that joined us. I

saw that we needed leadership, so I organized the Osceola Hunting Club, the first such thing in Baker County. We used my old family homestead on my property to hold our first meeting. We'd go out there and have cookouts and everyone that joined the club made a pledge to protect doe deer.

"Then it came to me that we spent a lot of our time searching for our lost dogs, so we built some lost dog pens. We put them at specific locations and if we found a lost dog we had a place to put it, and if you lost your dog you had a place to go find it. As far as I know the lost dog pens were the first in the state. Most everyone around here loves to hunt and pretty soon we had more than 100 members in the club.

"About this time the governor had called Baker County's sheriff to Tallahassee and gave him 30 days to clean up the moonshine and gambling. A committee to rid Baker County of the moonshine stigma was formed composed of such men as Edwin Fraser, our Senator; John Crews, our representative, and businessmen like Paul Rhoden, Lewis Covin, Miledge Reynolds, Frank Wells, Jesse Frank Morris and Eldred Jones. We came to the conclusion you couldn't build a progressive county on the false economy of moonshine. There was this big political machine here in the county and it had just gone on for so long most citizens just accepted it. If one of their men got put in jail, his buddies would go down and make 'em turn 'im loose. If the authorities stopped a car up in Georgia with shine, and the driver ran and got away, the law here would go to where they were holding the car in Georgia and tell them the car had been stolen. He would say, 'This man reported his car stolen and I've come to get it," and the Georgia lawmen would say, 'Well, we caught it up here with a load of shine on it,' so the driver of the car would usually get it back.

"Our group wanted to get the county stable and functioning properly where it would have sufficient industry and business here that would provide people with jobs. When our youth graduated from high school or college they could find work here and not have to leave the county.

"Gambling was real popular right along with the shine industry. These two things were the main sources of money in the county and it got so bad that the man selling bolita out–ranked the ministers of the county. He would always be around with a pocketful of money. Kids

admired it, and they wanted to get in on it, too, so it was not an encouraging thing for the youth of the county.

"Edwin and John suggested we form an industrial commission. So we formed the Baker County Industrial Commission and they made me president of that. We sold little plaques for $10 apiece for business men and we raised money for a lobbyist to go to Tallahassee and try to get the Northeast Florida State Hospital located here to generate jobs. That we accomplished.

"Then the group that formed to establish some creditable things in the county began to look around for a new sheriff. They were looking for some young man that they thought would stand up to these people and they thought I could do it. I'd had enough fist fights that I think for the first time they might have been an asset. They wanted someone that could get as tough as the other fellow. And, too, I had been Master of the Masonic Lodge, served in the war, had been married several years and had a child. So, when a group of 17 met one night at Lewis Covin's house, they were asked to write down who they thought would be able to do the job. Fifteen of them wrote down my name. So, John Crews called me to come out there to the meeting. When I got there they told me what they had done and we began to talk about me becoming sheriff of Baker County.

"Well, I was ambitious about anything. I hadn't ever thought I'd be sheriff, but I knew I'd like to be. So I said, 'Well, I only have $800,' and they all said, 'We'll help you raise the money.'

"About two years before this I had helped Edwin in his race for the senate in Green Cove Springs. I'd go to the rallies with him where he was speaking and I'd work the crowd while he was making a speech. I'd go over and listen to what everyone was saying and find out what they were interested in. I'd go back and tell him so he'd include that in his speech. I got a taste of politics there and I liked it.

"That night, though, I told the group, 'Now if you picked me with the thought in mind that I'm going to catch your friend and you are going to want me to turn him loose, then you have picked the wrong candidate. I don't want it on those terms. All I will promise you is that I'll give you clean, fair, firm law enforcement and that's the only way I got in my mind I could do it.' I remember that Paul Rhoden spoke up and said, 'Ed, that's what we've been talking about. That's what we want. We figured that's

the way you'd be.' So I told them if they would 'help me get elected with that understanding of being fair and not having to listen to any of you tell me to turn this one and that one loose, then I'll do it'. That night each of them took turns telling me what they wanted in a sheriff, and I accepted the challenge.

"Edwin volunteered to be treasurer of the group. He called a meeting of supporters and we held our first rally out at the nursery beneath the packing shed. I took my fiddle and had J.C. and L.E. Harvey with their guitars and I think Junior Dugger was there with his mouth harp. The women made sandwiches. We'd play a little and talk a little and everyone had a good time. I remember people like Mr. Ivy Harvey and Eddie Combs being there. Edwin made a pitch about us needing money from the back of a flatbed truck and he had someone sitting there with a paper and pen writing down the contributors. Some gave five dollars and some a dollar. Fred Bennett came up there and turned his pockets inside out and contributed all he had. I remember that particularly. I think we raised about $800 that night. Back then you could run for sheriff for one or two thousand dollars.

"Edwin wrote a letter to all the ministers in the county. He told me if I'd furnish the steaks he would cook them in his back yard. Just about every one of them came and we talked to them about doing something for the county and how we needed to get rid of the stigma and provide jobs for our people, especially our children. Just about all pledged their support. I think there were two that didn't. We had black ministers there as well as white. The black ministers were a pretty strong political group and I got acquainted with them. So that's the way we got our politics started."

Yarbrough said he resigned his job with Standard Oil in February to prepare for the May election. His colleagues thought he was joking.

"I was known as a girl chaser before I got married. I had a new convertible and I'd take any new girl that came there, if she was pretty, out to lunch, riding her up and down the streets with the top down. They just never thought about me being sheriff. I asked for a leave of absence, but it was against company policy, but they told me I could always have my job back if I needed it.

"So I started politicking and went to every house in the county. A lot of the people didn't know much about me except I was one of those Yarbrough boys who was always getting in a fist fight. My brother Lewis was just about the champion puncher. He boxed in the CC Camp located up at Olustee and he was pretty rough.

"Anyway, I'd go around and talk to the people. They didn't take it too serious to start with. If a man was plowing in his field I'd just walk up and down the row with him, and if I got there around lunch I'd eat with him because I wanted to talk with his family. I found out that the morals in the family were strong, more so with the mother than with the man. I'd say to myself, I'm going to win this family because I'd taken me a course from Dale Carnegie and a little public speaking. I determined to put every bit of that to work and I'd set down to eat if they didn't have anything but tomatoes and grits. I'd eat and enjoy it. I'd tell them what I wanted to do about cleaning up the moonshine and bolita. Some would say, 'Ed, you can't do nothing about that, son, that's been going on for at least 50 years', and they'd say things like, 'All you're going to do is take it out of their crowd and give it to your crowd.' And they told me I might get hurt. I'd tell them I understood because I'd lived here so long but I'd tell them I believed a man could be honest being sheriff the same as he could working for the railroad. And finally they got to thinking about it.

"I'd go to the cemeteries and walk through there and see who was buried by who, and then I'd know the family connections and I'd know what to say and what not to say. I got acquainted a lot by just visiting the cemeteries, and visiting around the families. I'd talk to them about their children. I'd say, 'You know we owe it to these kids to do something about it, and we need to keep them from getting in it.' And the daddy would usually say, 'Ed, I do business with these people, they buy gas from me, or they'd buy this or that, and he'd say, 'I just can't get involved. I got to make a living.' They'd have all kinds of connections, every family in this county just about was connected through someone. I had to sell the program just like I would malaria or hookworms, I had to come up with an antidote. I'd tell them, 'I want you to look around at these little kids and think about it.' I'd say, 'Don't sell them out,' and they'd be real quiet, like they were thinking, then I'd tell them to pray about it. I'd say, 'Don't sell these bright-eyed boys and girls out, give them a fair chance.' I'd tell

them , 'I'm the man that can do it.' Some didn't think I could, some didn't think I would, but they got the idea that if they were ever going to do it that now is the time. We had a pretty good force, the churches, the business men, the senator and representative.

"I was running against Emory Jones and James Barton and I got in the run–off by 40 votes. In fact, they didn't think I'd won until they counted the absentees the next day. James liked to have had me and Emory both, he was way ahead. James lived at the jail and he was a very courteous fellow, and his wife was a fine Christian lady. They both did a lot for people everywhere, and it was hard to overcome. They're from two big families with all kinds of connections, plus the incumbent sheriff and people like Junior Crockett and those guys without jobs who claimed to be farmers were all out politicking all the time.

"We didn't have political speaking during run–offs so that's when I got me a speaking system put on my car and I got L.E. and J.C. Harvey and Junior Dugger and I would put an ad in the paper where we were going to be making music. We'd park in front of someone's store and draw a crowd. I'd invite everybody up to get a drink, a Pepsi or something, and we'd talk. They got to finding out that I wasn't such a bad guy and they liked music so I'd sing 'em a song. If James was there I'd even invite him to come up if he wanted to say anything. I'd hit two rallies on the same day. I soon got acquainted with just about everyone and we just kept getting big crowds. It was a first for Baker County. Nobody had ever put their picture on a poster around here until I did it, except for Lex Green who had one when he was running for Congress. I had a bow tie on, they were popular then. I know the rallies helped me sell the program.

"I put in the newspaper that I was four score and square against moonshine and it was a clear cut issue, and I'd say at the rallies, 'Now all of you who want to keep the moonshine get over on this side.' They wouldn't move. Then I'd say, 'Those who want something done about it and build our county on a solid economy where you can get a job and get credit to buy a home or car, you stand over here.' I really got their attention.

"I remember that Mr. Dan Dorman's family gave him a big birthday party and they asked me to go out there and play for them. Well, I didn't hardly know the Dormans, just Rex, but I went. They were all celebrating

and the men would go out there behind the barn and take a drink, but they wouldn't ask me to go with them, because I was against moonshine. They respected me and were going to vote for me, but they liked moonshine and was drinking it. We'd be up on the porch fiddling and they'd be dancing around. Everyone had a good time.

"Now Roy Harvey, long-time county commissioner from Sanderson, taught me a lot about politics. He was full of old-time wisdom. He'd say, 'Ed, just tell 'em to help you get in the run-off. Always tell them, 'Ya'll, just help me get in that run-off,' and they'll do it.

"Now at that time we didn't have voting machines. You had to watch that people didn't buy votes, and we didn't have enough money to buy many, but we divided up and went to watch at the polls. A lot of people back then didn't know how to read so they'd have to depend on the poll worker to mark their ballot. I only won by about 90 votes, but that was the happiest day of my life. The next day we had a big party at the river. After all of that was over, I went to visit Mayor Burns of Jacksonville. I had promised the people that if I got elected I'd go to school to learn something about law enforcement because we'd never before had a sheriff that had gone to any kind of law enforcement school. Police cars back then didn't even have radios, and very seldom did they have uniforms. Police cars were unpainted. So Mayor Burns got me into the police academy. I spent the next seven months before taking office getting instruction and learning all about the laws such as search and seizure, what I could do and couldn't do. I studied the Florida statutes. It was just a whole new world for me and it was a real challenge.

"When the first day of my job came around, I was up and running. There was a local native who was a state beverage agent. He came to me and told me he knew where a still was. I told him not to tear it up until I could go with him. So on the second day I was in office we went out there. It belonged to a man who had given me a hard time in the election. The still was located behind Southern Resin's forest. We went in there before daylight. I was wearing leather sole shoes and carried a gun, I didn't know whether I was supposed to or not, but anyway I had one that I put in my belt. We crawled up there and they were in there working before daylight. We could hear them talking. Then just at the first cracking of daylight the agent told me he'd rush in and flush it and said,



**Baker County Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough goes deep into the woods of Baker county to find and destroy illegal Moonshine still**

'They'll run toward you and you can catch them.' So he went around on the other side and one of the bootleggers walked out and saw him. He hollered back at the others, 'Revenuers!'. They ran; the one I really wanted to catch took off and I went after him. I ran and ran; I'd fall down and he'd fall down. We were in waste deep wire grass and with those leather sole shoes on it was hard. I had lost my gun but I just kept on running. I got real close up on him and I was give out, but I just made one big last dive like a football tackle and I threw him down. I got him by the belt and he said, 'Well, you the first that's ever caught me. I've outrun 'em 16 times and this is the first I've been caught.' I went back and found my gun. It had fallen in a little clean spot.

"The circuit court opened up the first month in January and we went to court just a few days after. We'd had the jury box purged and made sure some women's names were in it. I remember there were two ladies -- Dr. Watson's wife, Lillian was one -- that served on the jury. He had hired a good lawyer, and Ted Duncan was the State Attorney. They put me on the stand to tell what happened. Then they put the defendant on the stand. They asked him what happened, and he said, 'Well, I was just going through the woods out there, going over to Commissioner Kirkland's house to see about getting some dirt hauled and the sheriff jumped up out of a stump hole there and caught me and I hadn't done nothing. His lawyer said, 'Have you ever been convicted of a felony?' And he said, 'No, I've never done nothing wrong, unless it was sing too loud in church.' When he said that, the courtroom went up in laughter hahaha-haha. And the judge had me call order in the court. I beat the gavel down hard and called order in the court. Everything got real quiet. Before the jury went out, Ted Duncan said, 'Now the people over here voted to



**Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough destroys whiskey still in Baker County after raid**

do something about moonshine and bolita in this county. The state takes a position that we want to cooperate, too. Either you believe this defendant or you believe this young sheriff.' That's all he said, and the jury filed out. They were back in about 10 minutes with a 'Guilty as charged' verdict. Judge Patten sentenced him right there. He was to be delivered by the sheriff to the state prison for a year or two. That was my first victory. We took him right on over. Later on, we became good friends. This happened time and time over and the most touching thing to me was when we would start to load 'em up at the jail to take them over to prison, the wives and mothers and children coming to tell them good–bye. That was a touchy thing and I didn't enjoy that very much, but we really went on a crusade catching everything we could and not looking back.



**Baker County Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough destroys whiskey still after raid**

"We worked on a fee system then, $7,500 was maximum annual salary. In order to make enough fees we had to work traffic just to keep the doors open and the bills paid. I had to provide my own car, and my own deputy car. I remember I borrowed money from Jesse Frank Morris to buy my deputy car with. I had it painted green and white and put some sheriff department signs on it. Wilbur Mobley, a good honest man, was my first deputy. Later we added G.W. Rhoden, Eddie Nettles, Morris Fish and Wallace Dupree. I never had more than three deputies at one time. Someone who read about me in the newspaper from California



**Baker County Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough Inspects whiskey jugs confiscated in Moonshine raid**

sent me a pair of white tennis shoes and the Times Union came out and took a picture of me putting them on. I caught everyone I ever chased, in fact I caught some two or three at a time.

"I made an agreement with these boys before I got elected. I told them, 'Now if I touch you and tell you that you are under an arrest and you jerk loose and run, I'll just go get you after you get home, But if I don't ever catch you and you can ever outrun me, then that's your good luck.' That was a gentlemen's agreement and they liked that. It was fair play. I never did get a warrant for one unless I caught him. These bootleggers were smart. They'd watch to see where I was going and if they thought it was safe they'd go fire up their still. I remember one Sunday morning I went to church. I went in the front door and out the back door and had the state beverage agent pick me up. We left and went up to Baxter and found a still. This time I flushed it. Two had left and gone to their car so I hid behind a tree and when they were returning with those big jugs on their shoulder, just walking along there talking, I jumped between them and tackled them. The agent kept the dynamite at his house and we used that to destroy most of the stills.

"A lot of them I caught sent me billfolds and belt buckles from prison. I caught them fair and square, most of 'em pled guilty, and they weren't mad. They didn't like it of course, but they felt it was fair play."

Yarbrough, now a minister, said one of his deacons is a man he caught and arrested. "We're very good friends today. He told me it changed his life."

He even preached one of their funerals.

Yarbrough said one his biggest quests came when he was in office just a few months.



**Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough destroys Baker County Moonshine still**

"I passed by a local bar and saw this particular man coming out. I could tell he had too much to drink, so I took him in my car to the jail. I radioed up ahead for Mr. Shuler to have the jail gates open. Just as we got there, the man kicked at me. I had a little black jack with me and we fought a little. He was like a bull, but I finally got him in the cell. By this time, news had gone all over town and people were all out in the street, especially the bootleggers. They drove back and forth in front of the jail all night. The next morning I went down to the Blue Haven and I noticed everyone was calling me sheriff. They said, 'Hey, Sheriff.' Up to that time they'd been calling me Ed. I became sheriff over night. I had mastered the toughest guy in town. He was the bull of 'em all, and kinda run the town. He and I later became close friends and he attended the church I pastor.

Yarbrough said he was on his way to Baxter one day with his young son, Klate, riding along with him when suddenly a tire rod fell off the car as it was travelling about 70 miles per hour down the road. The car spun in a ditch that was slick with slim pitching the car sideways. Otherwise it was headed for a big pine tree and sure injuries or death.

"The man in the Walking Tall movie would look like a choir boy compared to what we had to do around here," he said. "From then on, I started inspecting my car real well before I used it. I found several things on occasion that were suspicious, so I had to be real careful."

Yarbrough said it was a common occurrence to see young men, who should be in school, squandering their time in the local bars and pool room during the day.

"These men were really the losers in the moonshine game. They'd run a still maybe every other week or two for someone else and they were paid so much a jug. Or they might haul some supplies. Then, when they weren't working, they would come squat in the windows like a

bunch of turkeys on a roost and watch everything passing by. We had a vagrancy law, so I started arresting them. I'd ask them what they were doing for a living and they would say they were farmers. I knew none of 'em owned an acre of land, so they'd say, 'Well, I'm helping my daddy out.' I've kept a few of them locked until they promised me they would go back to school. One of them told me recently how much he appreciated me doing that.

"I'd tell them if they would quit I'd find them a job, but if they waited until I caught them, not to expect me to try and get them out of it. Pretty soon, the moonshine business began to die down."

The first moonshine conspiracy case made in the State of Florida was initiated by Yarbrough while in office.

"We caught two young boys at a still one time and it was a real sensitive thing. I called the state Attorney the next day and he came over and talked to those boys. They told us who they worked for and who paid them. Bill Eddy, the state-wide beverage agent, came and helped me with it. We made a case against that man and he got the longest sentence of anybody at that time. I think it was three years. The federal men could make conspiracy cases, but it's in the law books that it was the first case made in the state of Florida.

Yarbrough's feeling about Junior Crockett, reputed Shine King, was voiced with respect.

"I don't think Crockett was really into making moonshine, he dealt more or less in selling shine and supplies. I don't know of it if he ever made any of it himself. When I ran for office, Crockett never said anything to me, but after I won he stopped by the jail one day and began to tell me what he was doing. He said it could mean something to me if I was interested. It had something to do with pin-ball machines I think. He didn't say whether or not it was legal or illegal and I didn't ask. He asked me if I was really going to enforce the law like I said, and I told him the people had voted to do something about it and I pledged my whole reputation to do it. I told him I was going to do my best. I told him I hoped we could be friends, but if he did anything illegal I would treat him just like anyone else. We had a good understanding. Junior left and I never did know of him doing anything in the county after that. He let me know that he respected the ballot box, and that the majority had voted.



**Sheriff's Posse 1950s**
**Bottom row (l-r): James Mattox, Danny Woods, Hugh Fish, Harold Griffis and Leonard Davis. Middle row (l-r): Johnny Smith, Isaac Barton Holt, Ronny Crummy, Larry Tanner, Ronnie Crawford, Mike Rhoden. Top row (l-r): David Johns, Joe Addison, Dwayne Crews, Sheriff Ed Yarbrough, R.L. Starling, Roy Maley, Wallace Foran**

"Junior was a real likeable person. My daddy always liked his daddy and one time when daddy had appendicitis Dr. Crockett let him and my mother stay in his home until he recovered because we didn't have a hospital back then. And I remember when Junior ran for State Representative. He almost beat Mr. Johnny Dugger, a banker who would loan some people money and they didn't even have to sign for it. He was very popular. Junior ran a good race, I know our family supported him. He was very young back then, and I've often wondered since then just how far he might have gone in politics because he had such a likeable personality. He had an excellent mind and he'd do a man a favor in a minute. I think he may have been successful because he was very political minded. That's what I think if circumstances had been different. Junior had lots of friends, and I'm sure a man like him would have gone on to the senate and possible higher. He had a real knack for business and he is a man who knows how to promote and get along with other people. He's the kind of fellow I would have liked to have had in my business."

What do you say to the people who say you took money to protect the moonshiners and business people who sold liquor in their business on Sundays? Yarbrough was asked in the interview.

"Well, nothing could be farther from the truth than that because I didn't. And I didn't have a middle man either. If anybody got paid they didn't bring it to me. All shine sales were shut down. I caught everyone I could and there's nobody that can tell you honestly that I never did that. I never took a pay–off; no one ever offered me one. Crockett mentioned

something to me about a business, but never any money. I never remember a man offering me a nickel for shine or bolita peddling.

"I tried to be fair but firm with the people and I think most of them will remember it that way."

Yarbrough's fame spread as headlines blared across newspapers throughout Florida. The people in surrounding counties, adjoining Baker, began to insist on clean– up campaigns in their areas.

In 1965, while serving his third term as sheriff of Baker County, he was appointed Director of the Florida Sheriff's Bureau by Democratic Governor Haydon Burns. He resigned his job as sheriff and moved to Tallahassee. He resigned the appointed director's position under the political reign of Republican Governor Claude Kirk, saying at the time, 'I refuse to compromise my principles.'

In 1979, Yarbrough was baptized in the little St. Mary's River by former Sheriff Asa Coleman, the man who chose not to run again the year Yarbrough was elected. (See interview and experiences of these two men in Volume 2 of *Once Upon a Lifetime*)

Today, he divides his time between his large 500–acre farm in Taylor, a large congregation of worshipers in The Lord's Church where he is pastor, and a security guard and detective agency in Jacksonville. He and his wife, Faye, recently built a large rambling log house with all the modern amenities. His easy chair faces west and he can view the evening sun setting on the vast fields where roaming Hereford cows add to the picturesque scene. It is his legacy, a place where his revered ancestors settled more than a century ago when they ambled in with a now aged land certificate dating 1883. Today, the treasured document, fashioned from antique parchment and signed by U.S. President Franklin Pierce, hangs on a prominent wall in his living room.

Intelligent and keen, still robust and masculine at 68, Yarbrough's enormous contribution to Baker County's rejuvenation may never be completely realized, but he was the man who was in the right place at the right time and his endowment will go down in the pages of Baker County's history as a man who was "walking tall".

# Phillip Yeats Tomberlin

**State Wide Special Investigator, Baker County, 1949–1972**

*"I called him by name and told him, 'I'm not going to wrestle with you any more, but I know who you are and if you run, I'm going to shoot you.' I believe he had about $3,500 in his pocket and he was saying, 'Let me go, let me go, take this and let me go.' But I said, 'No, I've been trying to get you too long, now you have got to go to jail.'*



**Phillip Tomberlin**

For 23 years, Phillip Tomberlin traipsed the backwoods and by–ways of Florida looking for illicit moonshine operations. He was a Florida state beverage agent who had the authority to cross over into Georgia and Alabama, if circumstances made it necessary. He knew the Baker County moonshiners, most of them anyway, by their first name. They called him 'the white–haired man' or Phillip, because they couldn't remember his unusual last name.

He chased them on foot through the native palmetto thickets, treacherous swamps, and along the sandy river banks. He risked his life at speeds of 115 miles–per–hour, racing down the narrow two–lane highways and dusty unpaved backroads in his revved–up Chevrolet with its Corvette engine, pitted against the shine hauler's souped–up

Chryslers. Now, at the age of 82, he has little trouble recalling the many events of those days when moonshining was, he said, 'a way of life' for many Baker Countians. And he holds the distinction of being the first lawman instrumental in uncovering the county's first underground moonshine still operations.

"I had a keen smell for fermenting mash and whiskey," he said, as he recalled the days that are definitely a part of Florida's history, yet largely remain unrecorded by those who lived through them. "I was kinda like a bird dog," he noted.

It was a clear day, back in the early '50's, when Tomberlin and four of his state agent buddies were riding south of Macclenny, heading west on Woodlawn Road. An east wind blew through the windows of their non–airconditioned car. Tomberlin sniffed the air. He was certain he smelled whiskey.

"Back in those days, we carried our lunch to work with us in a paper bag, so we decided to stop down by this creek to eat and have a look around," he said. " We checked the area out, but couldn't see any signs of an operation. There was an older agent with us by the name of Miriam, and two others named Spinks and Claude Veal. I told Miriam, who was driving, to stop at this nearby residence. There was a cypress pond on the east of the property that you couldn't see through, and I could smell something that reeked of whiskey or fermented mash. I got out of the car. The home had a picket fence around it, and directly south adjoining it, was about two acres. I recall it was fenced–in with barbed wire. "So I left the vehicle and walked south of this fenced–in area, climbed over the fence and went around to the east side of it. I couldn't smell it anymore, so that eliminated the fact that the still might be in the cypress pond. As I stood there, I saw four old–fashioned chicken coops behind the house, located on the south side of the residence. I noticed a green rubber hose coming from one of the coops and observed that some fluid had run out on the ground. I picked up some of the damp sand and smelled it. Agent Veal had followed me around there, and I said, 'Smell this, it smells like whiskey is in it', and Veal remarked, 'Well, these old country folks wash clothes and pour that water out and it kinda sours.' I told him, 'Well, it doesn't smell like that to me.' I looked down, and noted that where I

was standing was black dirt, and on the other side of the fence I observed that, where either rye or oats had been planted, was clay. I thought, 'Now, they don't haul clay in to plant oats.'

"By this time it was about 4:30 in the afternoon and Miriam was hollering, 'Let's go, let's go,' so I returned to the car. I said to the agents, 'Well, we have heard about these underground stills, but we have never found one.' About that time, a car drove up in front of the residence and agent Miriam said, "Well, if you feel that way about it, I'll go back up there to the house and talk to the man.' So I got back out of the car and crawled through the barbed-wire fence. I walked to the first chicken coop and looked in to discover Ball fruit-jar cases stacked up about shoulder high to me, and I'm about six feet tall. And as far as I could see was wooden barrels. I had found the underground still. It was relatively new. The man, who was Tommy Register, told us he had just come back from making arrangements about shipping the whiskey out that night. He talked to us freely, and was very nice. We took our fire axes and started tearing the operation up, but the more we tore up, the deeper it got and the stronger the fumes, so we had to get out. We went back the following morning and had the people come out of the house while we put dynamite in there to blow it up.

"By golly, two weeks later we got a call about another underground still about four or five miles north of Margaretta. It was at a place we referred to as the old Kelly place and it had an old two-story home up there on it. We couldn't get too close to watch it, but used binoculars from a distance. We saw enough to get a search warrant.

"When we arrived, the still was in operation. We had obtained a daytime search warrant that had to be served before the legal sundown. We had seen a man several times come up from the underground with a jug of whiskey on his shoulder, and then he'd go back down with a sack of sugar. One of those we arrested that day was Hamp Register, brother to Tommy. And just before dark, we saw headlights coming down the road. It turned out to be Junior Crockett driving a brand-new Cadillac. I think it had 350 miles on it. We were surprised that he would show up at one of the stills because he was one of the big ones. Then, driving in right back of him, was Glen Johnson, driving

either a ton-and-a-half or a two-ton truck that had 640 gallons of moonshine in one-gallon tin cans. Crockett didn't attempt to run, but Johnson ran and got away from us.

"We had also found at that location an International truck with a closed in body. It had Capitol Paper Company written on both sides of it. When I first saw it, I said, 'By golly, I've seen that truck on occasion between here and Miami and between here and Tallahassee, and I know it must have been hauling whiskey in parts of Georgia and other places as well.

"The best I can recall, they had run off about 400-500 gallons at the Kelly place, and they had brought that 600 gallons in there to load on the Capitol Paper Company truck. We seized the Cadillac and the two trucks and arrested Crockett with Register, and three black men, Herman Rewis, Lewis Moore and Albert Mitchell.

"That first underground still was the beginning of a conspiracy," he continued. "It was on Crockett, and eventually it turned out he was responsible for the hole being dug. We found out a man from Palm Valley, in St. Johns County, carried the equipment out there to dig the hole."

Tomberlin's feat received headlines in The Florida Times Union on January 29, 1953, heralding the arrest of Junior Crockett, 'Kingpin' of the Baker County moonshine operations. The still was said to consist of a 600-gallon capacity distilling pot and 70 barrel fermenters, containing 3,500 gallons of mash. The agents reported seizing approximately 1,000 gallons of moonshine liquor in one-gallon cans, wrapped in onion sacks.

The article reported that the 'under ground hole' was about 40x40 feet with shoring to hold up the ceiling and about two feet of earth above the ceiling. The article described the site as being concealed in a chicken yard with out-buildings that covered the vents. Below the ground, bottled gas was being used to heat the pot. The mash was fermented from the fermenter to the pot by an electric pump. The place was equipped with electric lights. The article described the operation as 'elaborate.'

It appeared that someone was squealing and bringing a halt to the longtime operation of moonshine in Baker County that once was

shrouded in trust and confidentially. The beverage department's phone lines were ringing continually.

Tomberlin continued his story describing the conspiracy. "We soon received information on another underground still located about three miles north of Macclenny on the Thrift farm. There were Thrifts out there and they were all kind of like a lieutenant and sergeant for Crockett in that business. That still operation was pretty easy to get a warrant for because we could hide right across the road to observe the activities. As it turned out, there was a Sigers place up there and we later found one on that property that had fallen in. Actually we found two that had fallen in later. It was one of the neatest stills. It had an electric fan, a cement floor, and good water."

Tomberlin's triumph this time was the destruction of Harley Thrift's underground still. Not known to Tomberlin at the moment he seized the Thrift still, just a few hundred yards away, another underground still was in full operation by the Sigers brothers, Elzy and Ralph. The brothers hurriedly finished making their whiskey and closed down for the night. Harley's nephew, Willard Thrift, who lived near–by, and his father, Londa, had a whiskey operation going in the back of a pick–up truck parked in the barn. He watched the invading activities that night from the cornfield with Harley's brother, James. At the same time, across the road from Harley Thrift, sat a truck loaded with freshly manufactured whiskey in yet another near–by underground still owned by Wallace Dupree and operated by Carl Rewis. While the beverage agents were occupied dynamiting Harley's still, Wallace and Carl hurried to drive their loaded whiskey truck to a safer location. Then, to be safe, Wallace and Carl closed down their underground operation and later moved the equipment to a more secure location.

Eventually, the deserted underground structures crumbled to decay. Some area residents still remember when the dynamite demolition of Harley's still shook the very foundations of their homes miles away, rattling windows and shaking walls.

Tomberlin remembers another incident that occurred in the Osceola National Forest situated on, or about, the Columbia–Baker County lines.

"It was a big one," he recalled. "Me, along with two federal agents named Frank Watt and Don Perry, located it about 10 a.m. one morning. There was a jeep parked there with a flat tire on the front wheel and some whiskey. The shine was ready to ferment, ready to cook, so we decided we'd just stay around and wait on the shiners to return. "About 2 a.m. we heard vehicles coming. They were driving about a ton–and–a–half or a two–ton truck. We hid in the bushes and while they were unloading we had agreed that Watt and Perry would go to the rear of the truck and I'd go to the front. The two unloading didn't resist. One was Junior Rewis and the other a Dixon boy. Junior's brother had been standing there with a flashlight and he started running down a fire lane. About 100 feet from there, we fell into some palmetto bushes and I didn't know it until later, but I cracked some of my ribs struggling with him. At the time, I was about 45 years old, and this was a 23–year–old I was grappling with. He still held the flashlight in his hand and when I couldn't hold him any longer, I grabbed him by the leg and pulled him back down and could easily identify him with the flashlight shining in his face. I recall that I called him by name and told him, 'I'm not going to wrestle with you any more, but I know who you are and if you run I'm going to shoot you.' I believe he had about $3,500 in his pocket and he was saying, 'Let me go, let me go, take this and let me go.' But I said, 'No, I've been trying to get you too long, now you have got to go to jail.'

Tomberlin said it was 10 a.m. the next morning before all the vehicles were cleared and arrangements made to tear the still up. "We had to get dynamite because they had used steel vats for the fermenting. Several hundred gallons of whiskey were already there at the still site. When the whiskey was set out in the sunshine, it would turn an orange color, but you could set it in the shade and take the stopper out of it and it would clear back up.

"The Rewis boys were the only ones really who tried to pay me off. Every time they would see me, they were just as nice as they could be. They called me 'Mr. Phillip'. I never had them be disrespectful.

"I never could classify a man making whiskey with a man that would rob a bank, shoot somebody, or steal a car, or things like that. I

just think this was a way for them to make a living like their fathers before them. They'd been raised up that way. However, when they started getting as big as Crockett and the Rewis boys, then those are some of the ones we really tried to get at. We knew each other almost by first names. I never believed in mistreating anyone of them, but I didn't take anything off of them either. I never had many of them resist me, and during my career I only had to shoot one man and that was over in Clay County. There is a lot more that could be told that happened out there, and to be frank with you, I don't have any records left after so long a time. I had a pile, but I finally just got rid of them."

Tomberlin now relies on his memory, which is exceptionally keen at age 82.

"It took us ten years trying the Crockett case," he said. "Crockett appealed after a jury found him guilty, then at the next trial three men on the jury, one a former beverage agent from Daytona, got into trouble with jury tampering and one was convicted. Crockett was never tied to that, but that incident got us a mistrial. By the time of the third trial the witnesses were scattered all over the United States, some had died, and we just never got any convictions.

Tomberlin remembers an incident with Baker County moonshine hauler Glen Johnson that happened up in Georgia.

"I recognized a big semi–trailer truck that I used to see in Macclenny. Glen Johnson usually drove it. I think it had an Oldsmobile engine in it. Anyway, I was to get in front of him and try to block him, but by golly I failed to do that. The truck had a steel body on it, so the agent in back of me on my side and agent Frank Watt on the passenger side attempted to shoot the rear wheel tires out on it. They had a steel shield over those tires and the bullets started bouncing back toward us. We crossed over this little river and then Glen just pulled that thing over and jumped out. I started running after him, but he out–ran me. We even had blood hounds, but he eluded them. We confiscated the truck with seven or eight hundred one–gallon cans of whiskey. Glen had left his shoes in the truck, so on a later date I saw him in Macclenny and stopped him. I said, 'Glen, here's your shoes you left in that truck up there in Georgia,' and he said, 'That's not my shoes!' Glen had little bitsy feet, but he sure could run like a deer."

In 1949, when Tomberlin started work in Baker County, Asa Coleman was sheriff. "Florida's governor, Dan McCarty had died and Charley Johns from Starke was appointed to complete his term. He called Sheriff Coleman to Tallahassee, along with me and Frank Watt. That resulted in the governor telling the sheriff to clean up Baker County, and he gave him 30 days to do it. Well, I was the man Sheriff Coleman called most of the time when he'd get information. We couldn't get home and get to bed good when he'd call and say, 'Well, I found another, be here in the morning.' That's when I started working with his deputy, James Barton, and they really cooperated with us, they really did. I never heard that Sheriff Coleman, or his deputy, ever took money or anything other than just maybe leaving the shiners alone. I never heard of the shiners paying them off and I don't think anyone ever did. After Sheriff Coleman left office I worked real close with Sheriff Ed Yarbrough. I never knew of him being unethical and I worked pretty close with him. Anything to the contrary was just rumors, or talk, because I worked with him for years and we caught the violators. I never knew of anything he did indicating that he ever took money or pay–offs or that he looked out for anyone in the business. I can say that truthfully. I knew all of them shiners, most of them by their first name, and I believe I'd have heard from them had it happen. I even contributed to Ed's campaign because I wanted him to win so bad and I had that kind of faith in him. He did a good job for Baker County."

Tomberlin said his work picked up after the state provided him and another state agent with better, more powerful vehicles.

"Mr. Grady Cochran, who was the state beverage department director, lived in Lake City and I got well acquainted with him. We told him if he wanted us to catch those shiners, he'd have to provide us with faster cars. So me and another state agent, a fellow by the name of Bill Eddy, were each ordered a 1957 Chevy with a Corvette engine and two four– barrel carburetors. They would run 115 miles per hour in second gear. After that we were able to compete with their Chryslers. That's the kind of car most of them preferred to haul whiskey in because they could load over a ton of whiskey in one of them and it would still cruise at 115 mph."

Tomberlin retired in March of 1972 and today lives a quiet and tranquil life with his wife in their lovely Mandarin home located on the beautiful St. Johns River.

"I retired two and a half years early because by 1972 we had pretty well broken up the bootlegging commercially and I didn't want to work on licensed premises and in such things as gambling and prostitution. And, too, dope was beginning to come in. Things got boring and I was in a position to retire at an early age because I had worked on high hazard. So I chose to get out of it, and did. And I wouldn't want any part of it any more," he said emphatically.

Tomberlin married his wife of 55 years, the former Monteen Clements, in 1940. The two first met at a dance in Live Oak. When she left high school at the age of 15, she enrolled in Massey Business College in Jacksonville. Six months later, Louis Wolfson's oldest sister arrived to interview some of the girl students for employment in the old Florida Pipe Supply Company, located on Myrtle Avenue. Monteen began work on December 13, 1935, at the age of 16, and is still with the Wolfson family business interests after nearly 60 years of devoted service. She is on the Board of Trustees for the Wolfson Family Foundation, and serves as the corporate secretary.

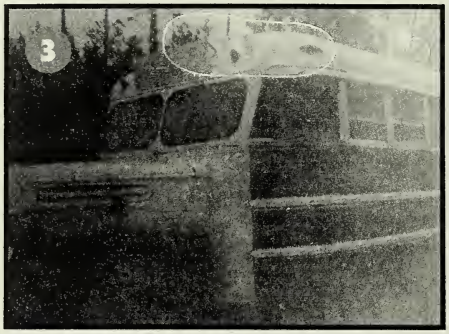
Tomberlin said he occasionally joins his wife on a few of the many travels connected with her employment, but for the most part he stays home and enjoys retirement and life in general.

"Most of my old buddies are scattered now, and I seldom run into them any more. Some have even passed away. I'm 82 and sometimes it takes me a minute to think about those days, but when I do, the events come back to me as if they happened yesterday."
















**1 (L-R): Beverage Director Keating, Governor Farris Bryant, Regional Coordinator Miller and District Supervisor Garrett consider tax dollars lost by illicit moonshine operations**

**2 An arrest by (front-shirtless) Wade Crawford, on mule Edward Anderson, in cart by Special Agent Bill Eddy and to far right, Baker County Sheriff E. Ed Yarbrough**

**3 Old blue and white school bus used to haul Moonshine from Baker County to Miami in undercover conspiracy**

**4 Special Agent Bill Eddy examines five gallon jugs of moonshine for fingerprints and other evidence inside the school bus with undercover agents after it was purchased from Baker County moonshiners**

**5 Car seized at home of L.E. Wilkerson, filled with sugar designated for Moonshine making**

# William 'Bill' Eddy

## Special Investigator, State Beverage Department

*"To tell you the truth, I could have put almost every sheriff in the state of Florida in the penitentiary back then, at one time or another."*

William V. Eddy



**3 career faces of Special Beverage Agent Bill Eddy**

Bill Eddy is as salty and tangy as his language. He is incredibly ethical and speaks with candor as his bright hazel eyes sparkle and his infectious smile captivates. At the age of 79, the jovial six–foot former Florida Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent can talk non– stop about his remarkable 56 years in law enforcement, but listens seriously with intense concentration as you speak. It's safe to say he is a living legend among Florida's most colorful sleuths and more than likely holds the distinction for being the most acclaimed and commended of his profession by many of Florida's governors and Beverage Department directors during more than a half century of the state's legendary moonshine era.

Does he remember Baker County's infamous moonshiners? –– You bet he does! Was Baker County truly the moonshine capitol of Florida? –– It was, he says.

If you want to know why he speaks so positively, he's eager to tell you why.

"There was more illegal whiskey being made and hauled out of Baker County than any other place in the state," he said. "At one time I could have told you where there were at least 52 stills in St. Johns County, but Baker County had fewer, yet larger stills, that produced more whiskey. It was hauled all over Florida, south Georgia and Alabama in semi trucks from Baker County," he said.

How does he know? -- It's easy. He conducted the largest and most productive moonshine conspiracy investigation and raid in Florida's history. It's all documented. It's all factual. With his little instamatic camera, trusty manual typewriter and faithfully kept diary recordings, he gathered first hand information that is now recorded on film and through the written word. It's all lined up against the walls of his home, spilling over into the middle of the room. Time-worn and fading scrapbooks, boxes of incriminating photographs, books detailing the chronology of events recorded into case histories, court trials, vital miscellaneous records, witness statements and photographed exhibits -- It's all there. And his is the watchful eye that guards his massive archive.

Eddy came to Florida from New York in 1939 after graduating from Delahanty Police Institute. His first job was with the Palm Beach Police Department as a member of the county's bicycle patrol, making $90 a month. He quickly advanced to the rank of captain, and his genius for investigative work spread.

In late 1954, the Florida State Beverage Department enticed him to join them, offering to furnish him a car to use as his own, and pay per diem. When he accepted, they handed him a list of Florida's Ten Most Wanted bootleggers and said, 'Go after them.' At least three of the names on the list were from Baker County.

"I remember that there was an old tin barn there in Macclenny where the moonshiner's cars were 'souped' up," he said. "They modified a Pontiac and it had a horsepower of 520. That thing would do over 200 miles per hour loaded with liquor.

"At one time I had a 1957 Chevy, and Sheriff Ed Yarbrough had a brand new Olds. We were out riding one night when we came upon two men and Ed jumped out and said, 'Sheriff's Department,' and I said, 'Halt!'

The men bailed out and ran, leaving their brand new Dodge. It was either a '58 or '59 Dodge, a real nice sedan. Ed was thrilled and asked me to drive the confiscated car back to the jail, but when I backed it up I accidently backed it into a pile of pulp wood, resulting in it being damaged. Boy, was Ed upset. He wouldn't speak to me for two days," he said, roaring with laughter.

Throughout many years, Eddy was often 'loaned' by the Beverage Department, with approval from Florida's various governors, to assist county sheriffs throughout Florida. He served as a temporary deputy sheriff for 37 different Florida sheriffs, including a three months assignment in Baker County. Once, in the absence of Baker County Sheriff Ed Yarbrough, he was given the authority to be the county's acting Sheriff for three days.

He met moonshiners he remembers, like L.E. Wilkerson.

"Wilkerson was an old– time bootlegger. That's the way he fed his family, and you don't fault a man for that. It wasn't like dope is today. Men can always get alcohol legally if they want it and if they are going to drink, they are going to drink anyway. And there is the good chance that he'll be ready for work on Monday even if he drinks. But you take this crack. You can't get off it. You gotta have it two times a day, then four times a day, and the next thing you know you are breaking into your neighbor's house, or worse. Moonshine wasn't like that. You take these old time bootleggers. If you caught them fair and square, and wouldn't lie on them to make a case, then there was a mutual respect between you."

Eddy remembers the time he and Ed Yarbrough were deep in the Baker County woods looking for moonshine operations and operators. "Along came two men, Wade Crawford and Edward Anderson, with a mule and cart hauling shine from their still. We caught them fair and square and they even posed for a picture," he said. "You could not have asked for anyone to be nicer than they were. They knew it was wrong, but they were not like a criminal. It was no more than if someone caught you sitting at your dining room table filling out your income taxes and you had cheated Uncle Sam out of some taxes. It was like,'Oops! You caught me!'

"To tell you the truth, I could have put almost every sheriff in Florida in the penitentiary back then, at one time or another. There

were a few exceptions and let me tell you something about Sheriff Ed Yarbrough. He was one of them. He was my favorite sheriff to work with and I knew them all. He was out there to catch the violators, and he did it fair. If he ever took a penny pay off I would have known about it because those things get out. Near the last of the moonshine business, it seemed everyone was telling on everyone else. I would have been the first one called on to investigate, and I never heard one thing. Baker County's sheriff had a good reputation.

"I worked with Sheriff Asa Coleman before Sheriff Yarbrough. He really let his deputy, James Barton, do all the work. Now they were two fine men, and I never heard of them doing anything except maybe not making arrests. But I ate at the jail a lot, and that was some good eating."

He remembers one incident that happened once in Baker County that possibly might stir up someone's ire even after the years have rolled away the past.

"Me and another agent, Frank Watts, slipped into Junior Crockett's garage when he lived in that big house up there on the hill. We didn't have a search warrant. He was listed on our 'Ten Most Wanted' list because he was one of the big ones. We crawled under a fence and when we got inside we found everything needed to set up and make a moonshine still. We inventoried everything including hundreds of these 4x8 sheets of steel used to construct moonshine stills," he said.

(Crockett, whose own account of his moonshine operations in Baker County appears in this book, admits he was a supplier to the moonshiners, but never owned or operated his own still. He adamantly denies ever having stored sheets of steel in his garage.)

Eddy remembered a conspiracy case in Baker County that resulted in several arrests of men who operated moonshine stills and made illicit whiskey sales. "I employed three black males who worked with me on previous investigations and who fully understood the importance of evidence and accounting for all their actions, movements, and recording each event during an investigation.

"One such black male, muscular 6' 3" Jimmy Lee Howard, with a record himself for violation of the state beverage laws and who had

served a prison sentence, lived in Miami. He was listed on our Ten Most Wanted list. I sent the three undercover males to Miami to acquaint themselves with him, and seek employment in his moonshine operations.

"They gained his confidence and began work on October 24th. They were paid $100 for each load of 200 gallons of whiskey. On October 25th the men were given $750 and told to go to Macclenny, Florida, and contact a white bootlegger named Sigers, where arrangements had been made for them to buy 200 gallons of whiskey.

"The three males arrived in Macclenny on October 26, and went to the home of Elzy Sigers, north of Macclenny. Sigers was not home, but they were advised to go to the Sigers store, located on Highway 23 about three miles North of Macclenny, where someone would be expecting them."

Continuing, he said, "On arrival at the Sigers store they met and conferred with the operator of the store, Billy Burnsed, who was given a deposit of $300 on the whiskey. They were advised to return about 4 a.m. the following morning. Burnsed met them, left for a few minutes, and returned with Henry James Conner. Burnsed then instructed the undercover men to follow him and led them into the State of Georgia where they picked up 90 gallons of whiskey at one place and 110 gallons of whiskey at another. They paid the remaining money for the whiskey and returned to Florida. As they drove past the jail with the load of whiskey, I escorted them to Raiford, Florida, where I examined the cache and took photographs and fingerprints from the glass jugs filled with moonshine.

"On October 30th, the undercover men were given orders to return to Baker County to pick up 200 gallons of whiskey. They were furnished an old model, blue–and– white school bus bearing a 1960 Florida license 24WW–438 to haul the whiskey.

"On October 31 they drove the school bus north of Macclenny to Sigers store, where they contacted Elzy Sigers, Billy Burnsed, and Henry James Conner, who loaded the whiskey on the bus. Then they were directed to the farm of Paul Crews in Charlton County, Georgia, where Paul Crews and two unidentified teenage white boys loaded more whiskey on the bus. The bus was then driven back to Sigers store where more whiskey was loaded on the bus, making a total of 330 gallons in various types of containers."

In all, Eddy said, the bus made three trips to Baker County where the undercover men purchased moonshine from Sigers. As evidence was gathered, case histories were being compiled against the defendants. The agents examined the contents on each trip, took photographs, gathered fingerprints, and noted that after the purchase, no tax stamps were affixed thereto to denote payment of the proper tax.

On November 22, about 11:25 a.m., Eddy arrested Billy Burnsed and seized his 1957 Chevrolet bearing a 1960 Florida license 52–1570. That same day, officers executed an arrest warrant and arrested Paul Crews at his farm in Charlton County, Georgia. They seized a 1952 Chevrolet, a 1954 Chevrolet sedan and a 1950 Chevrolet pickup truck. Traces of sugar were found on the vehicles that added to the evidence.

On that same day, Elzy Marvin Sigers was also arrested for violation of the internal revenue laws.

In 1950 Billy Burnsed had been convicted in Waycross, Georgia, by the federal agents and received probation. In 1956, he was convicted again in Waycross and sentenced to serve one year and one day. He was paroled after serving five months.

Paul Crews had no previous violations. Nor did Henry James Conner or Elzy Marvin Sigers.

The 161 legal pages of Federal Case No. 13272–M contained testimonies of all witnesses with descriptive accounts of their involvement, resulting in convictions.

Eddy said the conspiracy operation was conducted between October 24, 1960 and November 22, 1960. During this period, at least six different distilleries were set up and operated. A total of 1,175 gallons of non–tax–paid whiskey was transported from Charlton County, Georgia, and Baker County, Florida, to Okeechobee and Miami, Florida, resulting in a tax fraud of approximately $14,850 from the month–long investigation.

A total of nine vehicles were seized as a result of the investigation, with a total value of $8,000.

In January, 1963, Eddy received a letter of commendation from State Beverage Department Director Thomas E. Lee, Jr. for his work in directing 'Operation Shine Down', calling it the 'greatest drive against moonshine the State of Florida has ever recorded in history.'

Director Lee wrote, "The concerted effort devoted to this drive resulted in the destruction of 90 stills and was responsible for more than 100 moonshine arrests."

Apprehensions in the conspiracy were made as a result of evidence accumulated since March 1959 by the Beverage Department and several affiliated law enforcement agencies. The defendants were charged with being connected with 27 illicit distilleries seized in the Northeast Florida area during the period of investigation conducted by Eddy, who calculated the amount of known excise tax fraud resulting from these operations at $460,000.

In a news release from the State Beverage Department in Tallahassee, State Beverage Director Lee commented that this conspiracy case was probably the largest tax fraud case ever made by law enforcement officials in Florida. He pointed out that the organized moonshine racket was depleting the State and Federal treasuries of fantastic amounts of tax revenues.

Director Lee stated that 'Only when the key figures in moonshine operations, such as those arrested today, June 2, 1961, are brought before the courts can this vicious racket be curtailed.'

Lee commended Eddy and Sheriff Ed Yarbrough, and other enforcement officers who participated in the investigation, for carrying out the duties connected with the conspiracy in an outstanding manner.



**Florida Governor Bryant climbs fence to participate in Florida's largest Moonshine raid**

And thus ended the largest moonshine operation ever conducted in Florida. It was climaxed by the participation of Florida's then–Governor Farris Bryant, whose plane landed on Interstate 75 near the still before the raid. Accompanying him were State Beverage Director Richard B. Keating, Regional Coordinator Hugh Miller, District Supervisor Jack Garrett and Administrative Assistant A.S. 'Sonny' Mann, all of whom took part in the raid. The 500–gallon weekly capacity still, located northwest of Gainesville in Alachua County, was in full operation at

the time of the lightning–swift raid. The report said that a Baker County native (name withheld), then living in Jacksonville, was felled with a flying tackle and arrested on the scene by A.S. (Sonny) Mann, the Beverage Department's second–in–command. Another man from Macclenny, John B. Altman, was also arrested.

It was reported at the time of the raid that 'Moonshine in Florida is a $320 million retail business. More than a half–billion dollars in state and federal taxes is avoided each year while public and court apathy make jail sentences light.'

Eddy is still working, sometimes day and night. His 'boss,' as he calls her, is Lieutenant Sandy Williams with the St. Johns County Sheriff's Department.

"He's my best process server," she said, adding that his official duties require him to serve misdemeanor subpoenas, eviction notices, small claims and repossession notices.

"I'll be going out at 2 am in the morning," said Eddy enthusiastically. "Why in the world would I want to retire?' he asks. "All they do is die."

Eddy said that all his life he has wanted to be a police officer and dreamed about the future while he fed the chickens, goats, and cows, or while riding the old plow horse to the creek when he was young.

Grief engulfs the naturally jovial man who hides behind the facade of his big grin. Twelve years ago, the spark and light of his life faded away in death. She was the former Bertha Bird, his wife of 43 years.

"If I could change one thing from the past, it would be to tell my wife that I loved her, before she died; the three most important words in Webster's dictionary, yet I never told her," he said.

At her death, he locked the door to his home, removed the telephone, and stopped entertaining friends.

"You're the first woman to enter the door since she died 11 years ago," he told me.

Most things, if not all of Bertha's possessions, remain as she left them. Her bright red sweater still lays on the chair at the piano. The drapes remain closed, shutting out the light.

Although physical life went on for Eddy, emotionally he closed down. Much of his grief is compounded by the fact that he does not know who he is.

"I don't know who my parents are, their nationality, their names, the place of my birth, or even when I was actually born," said Eddy, the smile fading into the first signs of seriousness.

"The people who raised me, Grace and Leeland Eddy, saw an ad in the newspaper one day, placed there by a woman who said she was seeking someone to care for her infant baby for three months and that she would pay. The Eddys' answered the ad, but the woman, supposed to be my mother, never came back. It was during the war. The Eddys' raised me but never adopted me. They couldn't have any children of their own when they answered the ad, but had two after they took me in. I left home after I graduated from high school when I was 15 and worked my way through Delahanty Police Institute in New York, then I came to Florida."

And the rest is history for the man who says his days are still filled with excitement, despite his personal tragedies.

"Every time I leave the house I say, 'Goodbye Bertha, good morning God.' During the day if something nice happens to me, I'll say, 'Thank You God, Thank you Bertha,' just talking to myself."

Eddy's only child, William Randolph 'Randy' Eddy is a successful realtor in Orange Park. He takes pride in his father, and in his accomplishments.

The best advice Eddy said he ever received was from Senator Verle Pope of St. Johns County. Eddy answered a question of the Senator's with 'I think so.' The senator said, 'You either know or you do not.'

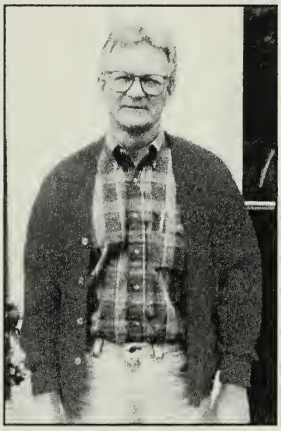
"Well, I'm 79 years old and I still do not know who I am," he said.

"I know 51 widow ladies and see each one about once or twice a week, mostly when they put the porch light on and I stop to find a stray dog or opossum in the garbage can.

"But there's no need to worry, God has my timetable all planned."

# BAKER COUNTY CITIZENS SPEAK OUT ABOUT MOONSHINE

# Larry Dupree



**Larry Dupree**

"Growing up in Baker County in the 1950s was one of the most unique childhoods a youngster could experience. Our county had a reputation known far and wide as the moonshine capitol of the South. I'm sure most perceived us as whiskey–making hillbillies with little to do other than drink our excess shine and puff on a corn cob pipe. That perception was all wrong.

"The facts are that moonshine became a way of life out of necessity –– the necessity to supplement meager farming or timber incomes that simply were not enough to feed a family year–round. As time progressed, the moonshine industry became much more than a simple means of feeding one's family. It was living on the edge, with fast money, and even faster cars. It produced settings and characters that made Robert Mitchum and Thunder Road look like what it was...only a movie. This was real, and the people who lived it were real, with stories that have carried from generation to generation.

"My family was involved from my grandfather, my father, my uncles, and even an aunt who drove a 1954 Chrysler loaded with 275 gallons of illegal hootch. I guess by the grace of God, and a mother who threatened my father's life if he allowed me to become involved, I was never a moonshiner. I have often joked through the years that I was 16 years old before I knew moonshining was illegal. I know it was wrong, but my memory of those times and those involved were good memories, even cherished memories. Those men of that era were good men and men who had great compassion for each other. Today, some of the most trusted friends I have are former moonshiners. I'm glad I had an opportunity to be a part even if it was from the outside looking in. Thanks, Mom!"

–– *Larry Dupree, former captain,*
*University of Florida Gators Football Team*
*and All American*

# Alan "Pete" Harvey



**Alan "Pete" Harvey**

"My family was farmers, and we lived on a farm south of Glen St. Mary in the Manning section. We made our living from the farm and my father didn't make any moonshine, but he certainly consumed a lot of it.

"When I was growing up, I learned from hearsay who was making moonshine and transporting it. You could always tell the people that transported moonshine because they had extra spring leaves put in the rear of their cars and had them souped up to run fast. Growing up I never thought of the people that made moonshine and the ones that transported it as doing anything wrong; that was just a way to make a living.

"My only participation in the moonshine business happened when I was a senior in high school. A classmate's mother had a coupe car and he persuaded me one night to go to with him to haul a load of moonshine -- about 10 five-gallon jugs -- and drop it off in the woods outside Gainesville. We loaded up these 10 jugs and went to Gainesville. He never told me who he was transporting moonshine for. When we were unloading it, we broke one of the jugs in his mother's car and we had a time getting it out of the car and fumigating it so his mother wouldn't know what we were dong. My parents never knew I did such a thing, and I don't know if his mother ever found out or not. We were scared to death and we never did it again."

*-- Alan 'Pete' Harvey,*
*former Superintendent of Baker County Schools*

# Joe Rhoden

"The one thing I remember about the bootlegging days in Baker County is the first underground still. I was out hunting quail in south Macclenny and I saw this bulldozer digging the biggest hole I've ever seen. I stopped to look for awhile and then went on my way. Some months later, it was destroyed and I knew then what they had been digging. They had a chicken house over the still and to get underground you had to go into the chicken house first." (Author's note: The still belonged to Tommy Register, whose story of the still appears in this volume.)

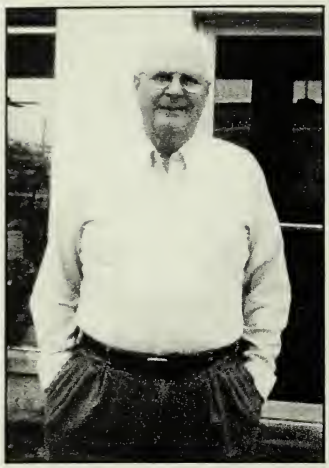
"One night, me and a pal were going to haul a load of whiskey over to Gainesville, and they were going to unload in some woods. The jugs were in croaker bags and when we arrived, my buddy had taken two jugs and sat them down. I came along with my two jugs and it was so dark I couldn't see very well. When I sat them down on the ground by the other two, one of them hit the other jug and broke all to pieces. Needless to say, there went our profit and, boy, I sure didn't do that any more. It was the blackest night you've ever seen."

*-- Joe Rhoden*



**Alene and Joe Rhoden**

# Ray Odom



**Ray Odom**

"When I first came to Macclenny in 1950 and opened up a retail business, I learned that moonshine was part of the county's economy. I just had a little old department store and those who traded with me helped me make a living. I catered to the people who were involved in it; most of them were nice people and, after 45 years, are still my friends today, although they are no longer involved in it.

"Moonshine was just a way of life for many people back then. Most of them didn't even try to hide it. My store was located next to a downtown service station and there are still scrapes today on the building that those trucks made going in and out. Many of the trucks were parked back of the station for servicing. It was just a way of life and when time for it ran out, it was over.

"I think some of them didn't want to change with the times, but law enforcement got to be more sophisticated with better ways to detect the moonshiner. The penalties got stiffer and some of them had to serve time in state and federal prisons.

"When the community became concerned, I worked on the development commission to try and bring employment for them and others to Baker County. I especially worked hard to bring the hospital here. All three of my children were born there.

"Farming was poor back then, and people needed new opportunities for employment. The community worked to bring those opportunities into focus with NEFSH, Ed Fraser Hospital and other industries.

"Back then, we had the moonshine to help make a living and it wasn't just for the moonshiner. For me, it would have been much

harder to make a living because they spent some of the money that came out of it with me and it helped to keep my business opened. It was a part of life that benefitted many people at the time. The ones I knew who dealt in moonshine were nice people and I respected them then and I do now."

*-- Ray Odom,*
*President of Pine View Golf and Country Club,*
*Dealer–Operator of Pine View Chevrolet*

## Edna Sands



**Edna Sands**

"I was born in 1931, the youngest of seven children, and this was a time when people were trying to make a living most any way they could. It was about the end of the Great Depression and making moonshine was one way to make a living without having to invest a lot of money. My Dad was a farmer, living on the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp and the St. Mary's River. To my knowledge, he never made any moonshine, but he sure didn't condemn anyone that did because he knew it was good for the economy. He liked to drink a little now and then, and he knew if the moonshiners made good money, he could sell his fruits and vegetables. I cannot remember having to go hungry and I always had clothes to wear."

*-- Edna Sands, former Clerk of Baker County Courts*

# Woodrow and Gladys Lauramore



**Woodrow and Gladys Lauramore**

"At one time, bootlegging was a way of life to live in Baker County as there was not much going on to make a living. I was employed to drive a delivery truck in those years and among the things I hauled was sugar and rye for folks that made moonshine. They had stops by the road, so I would stop and unload as many sacks of sugar and rye that was on their paid orders. At one time I worked in logging in the woods and I knew where there were a lot of stills but I never messed with them and the bootleggers never messed with me. If only people knowed what went into that mess, they probably would never drink so much of it. I saw opossums, coons, and rats that would fall in those barrels. Also a lot of empty bleach jugs out there that they had added to the barrels. They would also use the saw mill mule's fertilizer to add in to the sugar and rye. I never made, drank, hauled, or messed with any of the whiskey, but we had friends that did. It was the only way of life they had."

-- *Woodrow Lauramore*

"When we moved north of Macclenny in 1950 there was a real loud blast one day and it was so loud it shook the windows in our house. Later, I heard it was an underground moonshine still that had been blown up by the revenuers. I hope I never hear or feel that again. I thought a bomb had been dropped. We had a lot of friends that worked in that business, and they had to work hard and under a strain. They knew we didn't drink. I thank the Lord Woodrow found work so we could go to bed with a clean mind."

-- *Gladys Lauramore*

# Leon Sweat

Sanderson

"In 1935, when I was a 7th grader at Sanderson school and about 13 years old, I was visiting over at Mr. Lonnie Sweat's house, who was, incidentally, no relation to me. He was the Constable of Sanderson. I was playing with his two sons, W.C. and Frank, when these two men drove up and asked if Mr. Lonnie Sweat was there. The boys told them their daddy was out on the farm, so they wanted to know if we knew where the Lee Given's Juke was. I told them, 'Yeah, I know where it is,' so they said, 'Well, get in the car with me and show me.' I didn't know who they were, so we drove out to Johnsville, and parked close to Lee's Juke. The two of them got out of the car and came back with a man under arrest and they had a few bottles of moonshine.

"They brought me back to Mr. Sweat's house and put me out. A few days after that, one of the men around the Sanderson area got my dad off and said, 'If you think anything about that son of yours, you'll keep his butt out of revenuer's cars, or something might happen to him.'

"I don't know who it was to this day, and if dad knew he never told me, but they came up in a very belligerent manner to tell dad that.

"Back then, children would be absent from school for a day and if you asked them what happened they'd say they had to look after daddy's still while he went to town for something. So moonshine was not looked down on as an occupation back then by the people. In fact, some people used to seriously say it was the only way you could make a decent honest living."

–– *Leon Sweat*

# John Barton

Macclenny



**John Barton**

"My activities in moonshining was limited. Back in 1959 to approximately 1964, I had a lot of friends that were bootleggers. My best friend was a bootlegger. My only involvement in moonshining was that I hauled a small load a few times and also hauled sugar for bootleggers to make whiskey.

"I learned a lot about bootleggers and bootlegging from the late Lamar Knabb, a man whom I lived with from 1960–1965. He had a lot of friends that made and hauled moonshine. He told me a lot of stories about his friends being chased by the law and revenuers.

"Back in those days, most people in Baker County thought making moonshine was an honorable living. Over half the families in Baker County had a family member involved in bootlegging. It was just a way of life back then for people in Baker County. The only time my Dad was involved in it was when we lived in Mobley's Quarters in an old shotgun house and in 1956 to 1957 he used to sell it by pints, which was called pinting it out; that's when they would sell it out of their home by the pint or half pint. I remember he used to put coca–cola in moonshine to make people think it was aged copper whiskey so that he could make more profit. A lot of his friends would hang around and drink all the moonshine, so he just stopped selling it.

"I had a brother that got caught one time for making moonshine. I used to drink it myself and the worst I ever drank was whiskey made with syrup. When I was about 14 years old I used to pick up whiskey bottles and sell them to an elderly lady we called Ma–Minnie for five cents each and she would also give me candy. She had a Juke– Joint where she sold moonshine.

"That was my involvement in the moonshining back in bootlegging days."

*–– John Barton,*
*Supervisor of Registration, Baker County*

# Denver Dicks

Written by Denver and Laverne Dicks

"While growing up in Baker County during the thirties and forties, little did I dream I would one day look back and say, 'Well, that wasn't so bad after all.' This was hard times, not only for Baker County, but for our whole country as well. This is our history, never to be repeated, warts and all. So here goes my two cents worth.

"Some of this back ground goes back beyond my time but it helps me to understand these wonderful people who took the bull by the horns and did what was necessary to survive. And survive they did. Many reached the end of the hard times with land they could have never paid the taxes on had it not been for the only 'cash crop' available –– Moonshine!

"You could feed your family on collard greens and taters if you had a little land to grow it on.

"Invariably, upon learning you were from Baker County, outsiders would say, 'That's a bad place!' –– Not to me it wasn't. The ones I knew were kind, generous (the shirt–off–their–back generous) and for the most part, truthful. You could even buy load of 'shine' on credit. 'I'll



**Denver Dicks**



**Laverne and Denver Dicks**

pay you when I get back if I don't get caught. In that case it may take a little longer.'

"Few of us can say our lives were not touched in some way by moonshiners, directly or indirectly. Many of us finished school and some managed to make it through college, but for most it meant three squares a day.

"OK! Enough justification. It was against the law and we did take some hair– raising chances evading the consequences.

"I was not very brave or smart either; for that matter, sneaky was more my style and I managed to sneak by most of the time.

"We all depended on each other. It was your civic duty to notify your neighbor immediately if you saw the men (revenuers). The 'men's out' grapevine worked very well. Many a jug of 'shine' disappeared and many a still was running right along, all by itself, the shiner already home with that 'Who me?' look on his face by the time the law arrived.

"Local law enforcement, while being very intolerant of other criminal activity, for the most part was not concerned about what a man did on his back forty.

"This story was told for the truth but I will not use names in deference to those involved. A young mother was before the court trying to get child support form her ex– husband. The presiding judge asked her if her ex was employed. 'Well, Judge,' she said, 'He makes a little liquor.' The judge looked away and pretended not to hear but not before the smile on his face was seen.

"Another story I liked, also supposedly true, was about a shiner who was running his still with his old mule parked nearby for a quick

get away. Sure 'nuf, that old mule was fixing to earn his keep, for upon the first evidence of the law, that old mule headed for the bar, the stiller hanging on for dear life. The revenue men had no problem following the tracks of the fleeing mule. When they arrived at the home, the mule was in the lot and the shiner was hoeing his garden. The revenuers explained to the shiner that the mule's tracks were followed straight from the still to his house. The shiner, with a look of surprise on his face, said, 'Well, sir, if that old mule done it, just git him and take him on in!'

"If we were lucky enough to get the shine made, jugged and loaded without getting caught, the fun was just beginning. The law liked to win also, and could be right sneaky about it. There wasn't much they wouldn't do to catch us, and not much we wouldn't do to get by.

"Some of those Georgia sheriffs got down–right greedy. They probably didn't have to buy deputy patrol cars, just use moonshiner's abandoned vehicles, and abandon they did, if and when the law got too close. Hopefully, you had a buddy watching your rear to pick you up. If not, 'Woe is me.' Long night for sure!

"I always –– well, most of the time –– had a legitimate job and moonshined on the side. It would be hard to say if I profited from moonshine or not. Probably not much, but I thought I did at the time.

"About the time of my marriage in 1949, shining was getting a little more dangerous, more criminal (it was now a felony), and less necessary, for jobs were more available than in years past. This definitely was not a wise future for a husband and father.

"As many others, I was reluctant to give up my 'night job,' for moonshine had served us well, but it was time to move on.

"This period in our history is like the Old West, is never to return.

"As we reminisce, we have a tendency to romanticize the moonshine era, but there were dark days, also. Everything and everyone did not end 'and they all lived happy ever after,' but then, that is their story. However, we remember along with them.

"I guess we expect a certain degree of integrity in most people, but certainly not a law–breaker who makes and sells a product that

makes you drunk, sick and all the other things we associate with drunkenness. But, remember, there was no law against making whiskey, or selling it, getting falling down drunk, mean or sick. The law required you to pay taxes on this product and observe the rules regarding it. That was the law the shiners violated.

"It seemed as though most of them tried to make up for this unlawful necessity by being exemplary in other areas of their lives.

"'Less I leave the impression that shiners were extra special, let me say right here there were some good people in Baker County who didn't shine. Some who tried hard to keep me from being a complete idiot were Mrs. Rosa Wolfe, my 3rd grade teacher; Mrs. Susie Barber in 5th grade, Mrs. Fay Milton, 1st grade, and others. They did what they could, but I didn't exactly have an inquiring mind back then. Not the least of these good people are Leo Dykes, who turned no one away from his grocery store, money or not. There were grocers, Cecil Day and 'Rooster' Thompson. And Dr. Brinson and Dr. Watson. I'm sure they never got rich, but tried hard to keep us healthy.

"Earle Chessman, owner of Chessman's Theatre, gave all us boys a job although we were far from qualified for most things. There were many more, not the least of these, my mama, who killed one peach tree using it on my back side. After that didn't work, she looked to divine intervention. Prayer was a lot less strenuous and, I'm sure, did much more good.

"Finding employment that offered a future took me away from Baker County. Both my wife and I still have family there and visit often. We have memories that could be a book in itself.

"My wife, Laverne Johnson, sister of Glen Johnson, who was somewhat a colorful figure during this period, shares everything mentioned in this narrative, good and bad. She shares my thoughts, feelings and secrets, for me, I haven't told all.

"She also helped in putting it all in words, because asking me to write is like asking me to pray in church. I get deaf, dumb and blind, not to mention breaking out in a rash.

"For the record, I'm retired now and just sit around reminiscing and waiting for the Social Security check. I can remember thirty or forty years ago but please don't ask me what I had for breakfast!

"I end this epistle with a story that explains the feelings expressed here about moonshiners:

"I loaned some money to a moonshiner who had a run of bad luck that resulted, some years later, his spending some time in prison. Upon getting out of prison, he came by my house in Lake city a few days later, and gave my wife the amount of the loan.

"When we all get to heaven, I'm sure the Lord won't let us run moonshine, but maybe He will let us talk about it!"

-- *Denver Dicks*

## Margaret Anderson

"Edward was 21 and I was 16 when we married in October of '64. I knew he was making whiskey, but at the time I thought whiskey was made in a factory and not in the woods. I soon found out different. We were living in the McCormick Apartments and Edward was working for Webb Feed Store during the day. He would stay out until 2–3 o'clock in the morning and I thought, 'This ain't going to work.' I thought he was running around on me. So one night he said, 'You can just go with me tonight, and I'll show you what I'm doing.' So I went with him, and I'm going to tell you what -- I've never been so scared in my life. We were in this old coupe and had just loaded it with whiskey at a place near where the hospital is now in east Macclenny and started with it to Taylor to unload. He gave me a pipe wrench, and said, 'if the law gets behind us, just bust 'em,' meaning the jugs of whiskey. I was so nervous I smoked two packs of cigarettes from Macclenny to Taylor, and I said I'd never go with him again if I got home.

"When we were unloading the whiskey, I was helping him and just as I got in the middle of the yard, there was this police car that came by. I just sat down on the jug of whiskey in the man's front yard. I'll never forget that man saying, 'Lord–a–mercy, here we are trying to keep down suspicion and here this white woman is sitting here in the middle of my yard on a jug of whiskey.'

"I never went to work with Edward again. I got pregnant two months after we married, and when I was five months, Edward and two more people who were helping him went over to Lake City to carry a load of whiskey. We had an old '57 coupe that he hauled shine in and we drove around in, too. I felt like something was going to happen that night, I just had that feeling. I was crying and begging him not to go, but he went anyway. When they got inside the man's door, the revenuers were there. They ran out the back door and Edward crawled under a house in the quarters. The law got the dog after him and he had to come out and that's how they got him. He was sentenced to five years, but he was released early. Our son was 18 months old when he came home and he never messed with shine again.

"Edward worked for the airport in Lake City for awhile, and had been with Western Southern Insurance Company for ten years. On May 22, 1989, he was killed in a car accident driving home to Taylor. Twelve days earlier, on May 10, our daughter, Shelia Darlene Thompson had just given us our first grandchild, Kayla Ann. We now have four grandchildren. Shelia had another daughter, Marion Marguerite.

"Our son, Charles Edward Anderson, Jr., has a son named Jonathan Edward, and a daughter Tiara.

"Edward has an older son, Rodney Keith Brooks. Rodney's son is Aaron Keith.

"I'm not ashamed of Edward being involved in moonshine. His daddy was a moonshiner too. Back in those days, almost everyone did something connected with it. Edward was holding down a job at the feed store and trying to make moonshine at night to help us get ahead.

"The picture made with the mule pulling the wagon and Edward and Wade Crawford posing with Sheriff Yarbrough and Special Investigator Bill Eddy was made before I knew him, but I know Edward would just laugh about it if he knew it ended up on the front cover of a book. We're very proud of him."

*-- Margaret Anderson*

# BAKER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS
## In special appreciation of Casey Dinkins and Elgin Barnes

Elgin g Barnes

"If you think you are a Raulerson, you might be, but then again you might not be," says Elgin Barnes, a valuable volunteer of library services and compiler of numerous publications at the Baker County Historical Society.

"And if you are following my lineage and think you are a Barnes, you won't be. You would be a Roland," he firmly states.

And if your name is Dobson and you believe you are different in lineage from the Dopson clan, think again, you are one and the same in ancestry. The reasons why are found in the BCHS Library.

Elgin, along with Casey Dinkins, who serves as historian, curator, and library director, volunteer countless hours at their own expense to gather and preserve historical records of area families for the Baker County Historical Society. What genealogical facts they know about your family tree may surprise, and even shock you. Both agree that the lineage discrepancies all have to do with family traditions, folk lore and handed– down stories. It could be –– or it could not be true. Those who really know, are all dead.



**Left: Casey Dinkins**
**Right: Elgin Barnes**
**Baker County Historical Society**

Casey was born north of Sanderson across the road from present–day Dinkin's Church. His



**1994 Baker County Historical Society Macclenny, Florida formerly the Old Jail**

father, Edward Pendelton Dinkins, built the original church in 1908 for his mother, Melvina Dopson Dinkins, because the nearest church at the time was 20 miles away -- and, by horse and wagon, a good day's journey. The building was rebuilt in the 1930's and again in the 1990's. Casey's grandfather, Joseph John Dinkins, a Civil War veteran, came into Baker County in 1870 from Charlton County, Georgia, and settled north of Sanderson near the present-day Dinkins Church location, next door to his brother Belone/Belona Dinkins. He fell in love with Baker County native Melvina Texas Dopson and they married. Their child, America Texas Dinkins married William "Pink" Raulerson and the couple became the parents of 13 children, resulting in a large Baker County posterity.

Casey's mother was Mollie Annie Yarbrough, daughter of John Yarbrough and Anna Hodge, and although Casey moved from Baker County about the age of six years, he connects to some of the largest clans in this area. It was on Casey's first visit to the Baker County Historical Society that he first met a Yarbrough cousin, Beulah Yarbrough Wilford, and, with her urging, became a life member of the Society. Since that day 11 years ago, he has been a steady building force behind the BCHS. And that was only a beginning. As he began to learn about his heritage he visited the county cemeteries. Finding that some family plots had long been neglected and many pioneers were without tombstone markers, he really began to work. He started with North Prong cemetery, then Cedar Creek, Turner cemetery (which is technically Dinkins), travelled into Moniac to the Canaday cemetery, then on to South Prong and others, cleaning, repairing, replacing and adding, all at his personal expense.

Enter Elgin Barnes, only his name isn't really Elgin Barnes. He is Elgin J.R. Roland. His grandfather was John Roland, but when he came

into Florida about 1890, from Robson County, North Carolina, he changed his name to John Roland Barnes. Elgin doesn't know why the name was changed. His father was given the name of Lynn Adair Barnes, not Lynn Adair Roland.

"My name has always been a problem for me." said Elgin. "I'm known as Elgin, but my birth certificate says, Elgin J.R. Barnes. Since my grandfather was John Roland Barnes I'm referred to as Junior by some. The army enlisted me as Elgin Jr. Barnes, but that's not what is on my birth certificate. My driver's license was issued in the name Elgin John Barnes. The clerk asked me what the J.R. stood for and I told her nothing, just the initials of my grandfather. Then she asked me what the initial J stood for and I told her John so she insisted putting Elgin John Barnes. That's been about 20 years ago and it's still listed that way in Tallahassee. My military records are in the name Elgin Jr. Barnes, so I just sign my name Elgin J. Barnes. It's a mixed up world especially when I try and explain it to others," he laughed.

The two men often find good–natured humor in the traditions of mixed up lineages and names, but some things they are sure about.

"I know how my name Casey came about," quips Elgin's co–worker. "It was because Casey Jones was being whistled by everyone when I was born. It's a girl's name but I can't help it," Casey tells him.

They are, nonetheless very proud of their heritage.

"Roland, North Carolina, is named after our Roland family," says Elgin proudly. "My great grandfather was Dr. John Sanders Roland, and he goes all the way back to England," he smiles.

Casey's greatest interest is in lineages. Elgin's work, assisted by his wife, Dorothy Mobley Barnes, has taken them to every Baker County cemetery and some outside area locations, and the result is the publication of their findings.

The two men gather information and compile the records. They make it clear it is up to the researcher to discern fact from fiction, but if you visit the library, then this is a sample of what you could find in the records, especially if you are looking for Crews or Raulersons descending from Mack Raulerson and Emily Narcissus Crews.

"Mack Raulerson was really the son of James M. Albritton, a military officer in the area around Baxter. Albritton married Fanny

Raulerson, but he fathered Mack through Elizabeth, Fanny's sister, who had about six or eight children out of wedlock. She never married and Mack is the only one a record refers to as the father of any of her children."

There are bulging record books on the families of Raulerson/Albritton/Crews and the various family ties.

"I'm not in a position to say anything certain, because I wasn't there when any of this happened," said Casey. "But the records are here for someone to think what they will."

Presumably, the Raulersons listed in the book are really all Albrittons. For example, Caroline Raulerson, Mack's daughter who married Jode Thrift and bore him 12 children, should have been Caroline Albritton, not Raulerson. If that is true, then hundreds of her posterity follow the Raulerson lineage instead of Albritton.

Both Elgin and Casey are retired from Civil Service, and Casey also retired from the Naval Reserve. They average 30–40 hours a week working to preserve records pertaining to Baker County. Most of the time they can be found in the BCHS library on Tuesdays and Saturdays. And during the week? Well, most likely in a cemetery somewhere, recording, replacing, repairing, or a myriad other jobs.

Baker County could never repay these men for the good deeds they are doing, but neither men expect them to. Their dedication to the work of history preservation will be examined and explored as long as there is a Baker County, and -- like many a good antique -- prized more greatly as the years pass on.

# The Historic Franklin Mercantile

For decades it has stood guard, watching over the serene and peaceful little town of Glen St. Mary. Through two world wars, the Great Depression, and natural disasters, The Franklin Mercantile has remained steadfast, a tribute to the quality of life of a by–gone era.

Although the exact construction date of the stately two–story building is unknown, the main portion is believed to have been built prior to 1897. From the spring of 1911, Jesse Earl Franklin and his family lived here in the family quarters with its neighborly front porch swing and inviting rocking chairs amid a wide variety of the family's beautiful plants and blooming flowers. They operated a general mercantile and post office in the main building until Earl's retirement as postmaster in 1959. He and his wife, Miss Sally, are still fondly remembered by many today.




**Left: Cathy**
**Right: Tonda**
**In front of Mercantile**

Playing a significant role in the development of the community, the Mercantile served as the social and commercial center of town, affording the

local folks news from far away places, as well as necessary provisions of the day. With the train depot just across the railroad tracks, the Franklin Mercantile was truly a gathering place. After Earl's death in 1968, though, it seems as if time stood still there.




**Left: Cathy**
**Right: Tonda**

Year after year, the talented Tomlinson sisters, Tonda Griffis and Cathy Mendolera, like so many others, were smitten with the grand old building and often stood in awe and gazed inquisitively at the curious old, rugged and aged structure with the inviting homespun balcony. It finally dawned on them; this could be the perfect setting for an old– time general store again.

With the help of Earl's only son, Cecil Franklin, the sisters' dream became a reality and in 1992, after 81 years in the Franklins' possession, the Mercantile began a new chapter in its history.

Today, the grand old edifice is surrounded in a sentimental atmosphere, overflowing with elegance and charm. It is a showcase for the handiwork of local artists, craftsmen and writers.

Old fashioned rocking chairs deck the porch with folksy charm, while inside an inviting and challenging checkerboard summons you to play a game. An assortment of local history books bids you to relax and recall the past.

"Miss Kathryn's Parlor" invites one to browse among a wide selection of antiques and collectibles. The cupboard in "Granny's Kitchen" is filled with a wide variety of archaic and Depression Era

dishes, kitchen gadgets and rare curios of days past.

Most unique is the "Man–tiques" room, catering to the masculine collector or browser, and set apart from the woman's world of antiquated relics.

Visitors shop to strains of nostalgic melodies intermingled with the aromas of mulling spices and potpourri. Occasionally, you are treated to a slice of Cathy's old–timey bread pudding and always the charm of the two radiant sisters.

Whatever you are looking for, or hoping to see, you'll most likely find it, and more, at The Historic Franklin Mercantile.

The sisters invite you to come stroll down memory lane with them at Franklin Mercantile. You're sure to enjoy the visit and return again and again with your friends.

Call (904) 259–6040 for more information.

The store is opened Wednesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.




**Left: Cathy**
**Right: Tonda**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have asked me how I became interested in writing, especially as it developed into so many varied phases: diarys, journals, poetry, songs, letters, short stories, features, interviews and on and on. So this is that story because
I owe a debt of graditude and acknowledgement to many people who have paved the way for me to do the work I have always loved and had an avid interest in.

Through my paternal lineage there has been a succession of writers, some famous and some, like me, who write for the enjoyment and fulfillment it brings. To those who came before me I owe much for my endowment.

Edgar Lee Masters, a great American writer, and I share a great grandfather Notley Masters. It has been said by many that his literary offerings changed the coarse of American literature. He is best known among his countless contributions for his Spoon River Anthology, and he has written verses, songs and satires. World Book encyclopedia says "his writing style is that of his own instead of regular form. His works reflect that of his life and his portrayal of characters is remarkable."

I regret to say I've never read his many contributions although I have an autographed copy of "Across Spoon River" about our Masters family.....a gift from his son Hilary, also a writer. Colleagues and educators have told me that we possess the same style and characterization of writing skills, and for those observations I am humbled. My narratives, in whatever form, are not written with any thought of achieving literary distinction. Far from it. It is merely an effort to leave in some form of preservation things of a much simpler and less hurried, less harried age. Things we may be too busy to sit and listen to now yet will want to know in later years. In tracing the Master's family tree, I have interviewed many members of this family who possess writing

skills and are adept at writing family sketches just as Edgar, though they are not as famous. Like me, they are amatuers who do it for the love and enjoyment of it. Before my Uncle Homer Moore died, he wrote me long descriptive discourses on members of our family that he knew personally, but who died long before I was born. His sister, my Aunt Ruth Campbell, wrote a book, like Edgar, on the family, for the love and fun of it. My favorite letters are shared with Aunt Ruth's grandaughters, Suzanne Banks Potts, and Marilyn Banks Horn, of Atlanta Georgia. Their lively descriptions of people, places and things, are more vividly portrayed than any famous authors I have read. Therefore, I firmly believe that my Father in Heaven has given this particular family talents with a mission. I'm very proud to say too, that all three of my children keep journals and family records, all three write poetry and interesting descriptive letters. My daughter Teri is editor of her company's newsletter. When Teri's daughter, Kayla, was only two she discovered my pictorial journal on the dining table, grabbed a pen, and quickly made her writing debut directly on top of what I had written and illustrated with photos. I was so thrilled to think she might be the next family scribe that I couldn't very well get upset with her. And how thrilled I was when my 11 year old granddaughter Tabitha requested a diary for Christmas, and my 10 year old grandson Ryan asked for a journal. Of course, I honored their request. Tabitha, who is a 7th generation Baker Countian, became a Middle School columnist/reporter for The Baker County Standard and did a great job. Her award winning poem, What I Want To Be, is published in the 1990 Baker County-Wide Homecoming book. So I am very grateful for my heritage.

Had it not been for my mother, Blanche Fraser Moore, moving to North Carolina when I was twelve I might never have thought about writing professionally. It was there, in Wilmington, that I lived across the street from a girl, my age, who wrote a column about teen-agers for the local paper. When I returned to Macclenny in 1950 and entered the sophomore class, I approached Mr. Tate Powell, Sr. and his son, Tate Jr. about doing a column called "High School Highlights". They gave me my first job...without pay of course. It was so much fun that I extended it into the summer months as "Teen Times". When I graduated

from Macclenny-Glen High School, Tate, Jr. offered to send me to college to pursue writing, but I was not in a position to consider his offer. A few years later, after I began my marriage and children, I wrote a column for him called, "News and Views" that contained the comings and goings of Baker Countians and the local social activities. Sometimes I added a "Citizen of the Week" to my column, highlighting senior citizens. I worked free but when my family began to expand, and I had no money for baby sitters, I reluctantly gave it up. Mr. Powell called me up and said he had people 'storming my door in protest that your writing has ceased' so he offered me $10 a month to continue. That was a lot of money in 1957. It was enough to pay some one $1.25 for a whole afternoon to sit with my napping children and clean my house too while I went out getting news and doing interviews.

But that all ended when we moved away from Baker County and I chose to devote the next two decades to being a homemaker and writing for personal enjoyment.

In the late 1970s I became a close friend of Nancy Weir, Food Editor for the Florida Times Union. Nancy read a story I wrote on Emily (Davis) (Mrs. Clede) Harvey from Baker County. She shared the story with Doreen Sharkey, her editor in Lifestyle, who in turn obtained permission from me to publish it in the cooking section of a Thursday's edition of The Florida Times Union.

The story received an immediate response from the public who requested the paper print more such stories. Doreen asked me to become the Country Cooking feature writer for the Lifestyle section. Many of the stories I wrote are about Baker Countians.

To Nancy and Doreen I owe a debt of gratitude. And for our continuing friendship I am grateful.

In addition to the Country Cooking features, Nancy had paved the way for me to meet the Week-End Editor, Elvin Henson, about writing a column on genealogy. At first he was reluctant to hire someone inexperienced in journalism, but after the story on Emily Harvey appeared he gave me the chance to write for him. For his confidence in giving me an opportunity to become a regular columnist for The Florida Times Union I shall forever be thankful. The chance has given me an enormous amount of opportunities and wonderful experiences

through the years. Though he has retired, we keep in touch and share a friendship that I treasure. In addition, Mr. Henson published multitudinous of my week-end feature stories, on front page and in color. I wrote about people from all walks of life.....and found the experience exhilirating.

I had the same experience writing for the Times-Union Features Department. It was Features Editor, Ripley Hotch, who first mentioned that I should consider publishing my stories in a book. He told me that the portions of my features being edited for space were too good to be lost. He encouraged me to keep my hard copy and consider publishing them complete with all the information I had gathered.

And had it not been for the opportunity Lifestyle Editor, Norm Going, gave me to interview Loretta Lynn, I might have never gained the confidence to interview and write about other celebrities like Alex Haley, Donna Fargo, Conway Twitty and Pat Summerall. For Norm's confidence, I am indeed indebted.

To Bill Roach, who has edited Volumes III, IV, and V of the Once Upon a Lifetime series for me, I am equally indebted. He was one of my professors at the University of North Florida. Since he and his wife Chris share an interest in genealogy, we became friends, and have remained so over the years. I deeply appreciate all the assistance and counsel he so willingly gives me.

And even with all the above, this book and any others that follow, may not have been possible without the love and devotion, patience and caring shown by my son Zac. When I first began writing for the Times Union I used an old, very old, manuel typewriter. Zac encouraged me to get an electric type writer, but I was afraid of power failure and not meeting a deadline. So he just walked in one day with a top of the line Olivetti and said, 'just try it Mom'. I kept it, and couldn't imagine life without it, but I also kept that old manuel 'just in case'. Then the computer age dawned, and Zac was telling me I needed a computer. Once again I wouldn't hear of something that 'might break down', or in computer language, 'crash', and leave me stranded. In 1992 when I received one for Christmas, I knew it was Zac who had put it on Santa's list. Today, I can't even imagine this book, or any other thing I

write, going to print with out it. Zac has furnished me software, and any assistance, I may need on the computer, but it is for his patience and empathy (my computer and I have a very long way to go before we understand each other), and support that I am most grateful.

The One I shall give the most credit is my Heavenly Father. He has provided me with all these good friends, opportunities and counsel, for which I am void of expression when it comes to verbalizing my deep and heartfelt gratitude. It is to Him that I give all the honor, and credit that may ever come for this work.

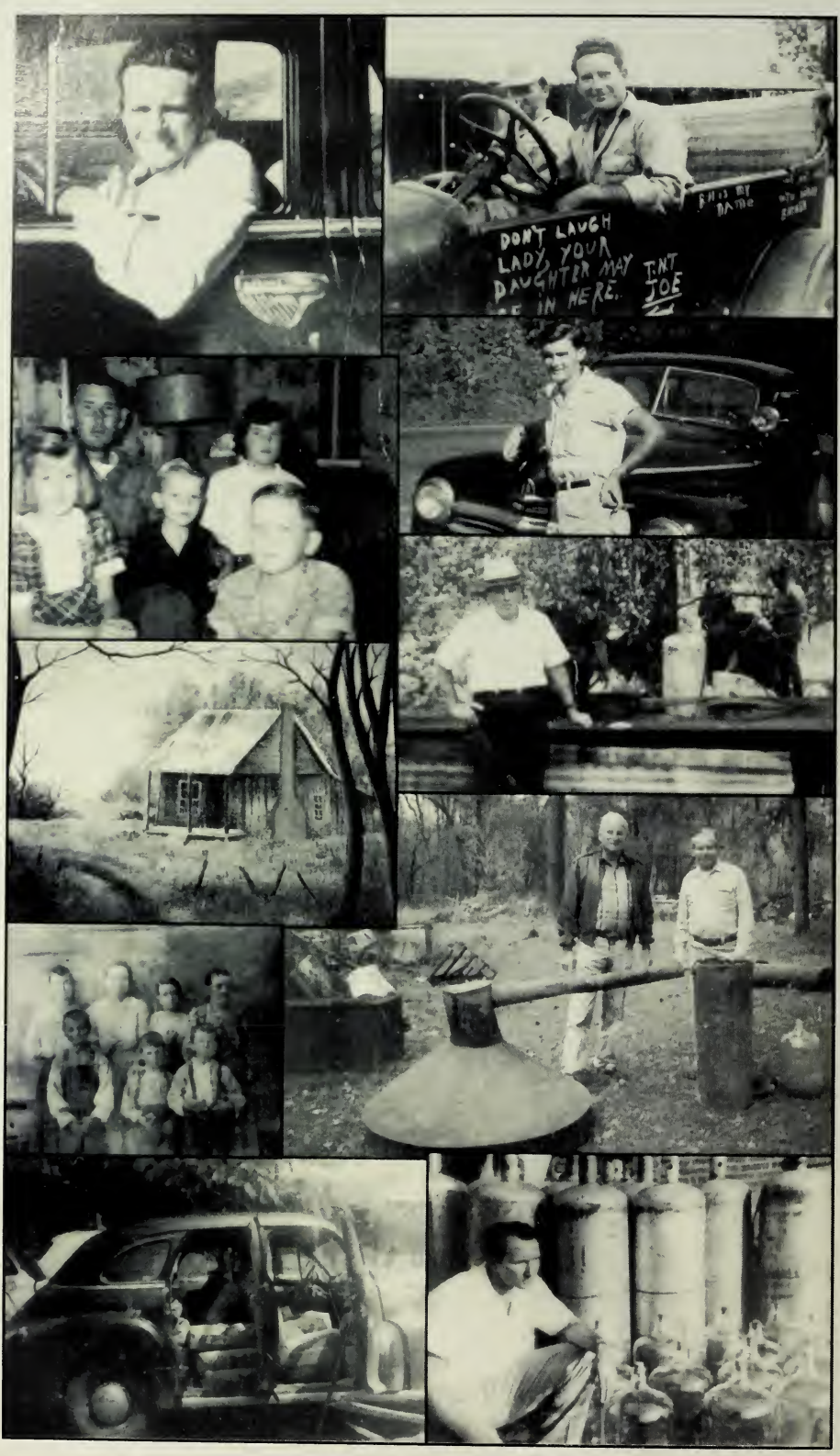
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MUSIC

Angels Will Watch O'er You
Who Am I
Tattered Box


DONT LAUGH
LADY YOUR
DAUGHTER MAY
TNT
JOE